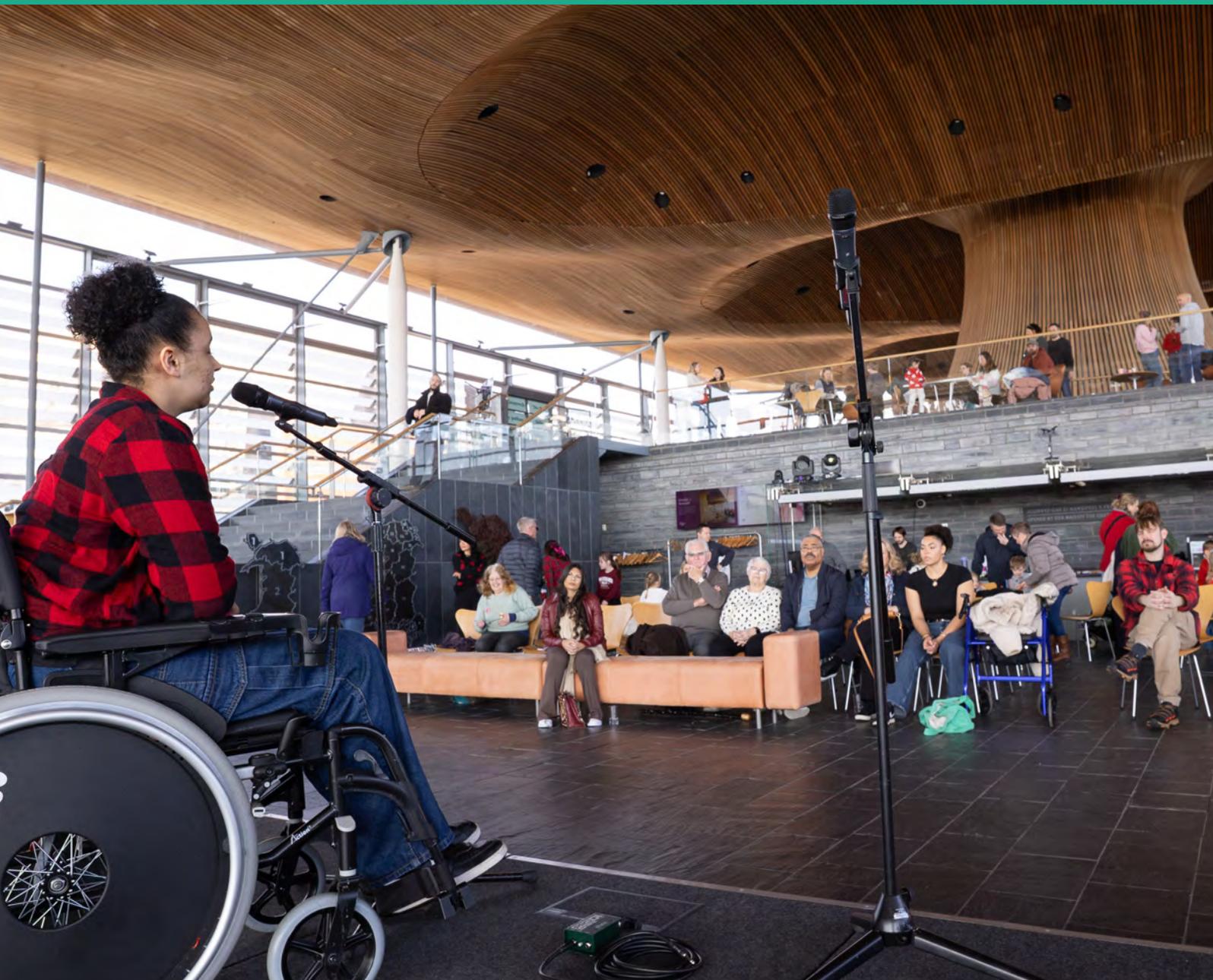


A Senedd for all: Report of the Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review

March 2026



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

An electronic copy of this document can be found on the Senedd website:
www.senedd.wales

Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NS

Tel: **0300 200 6565**

© Senedd Commission Copyright 2026

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the Senedd Commission and the title of the document specified.

A Senedd for all:

Report of the Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review

March 2026



About the review

The Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review was launched in July 2025 to review the Senedd's culture, ways of working, and facilities.

The work is overseen by a cross party Board, which comprises:



Chair:
Joyce Watson MS
Welsh Labour



Jane Dodds MS
Welsh Liberal Democrats



Peter Fox MS
Welsh Conservatives



Siân Gwenllïan MS
Plaid Cymru



Mike Hedges MS
Welsh Labour

A Senedd for All

Why have a review?

The Senedd is a global leader in women's representation, and we want to continue to be a world-leader in inclusivity for all and family-friendly working.

How we did it?

The Senedd Commission established a cross-party Board of Members to oversee the review. The Board commissioned research from academics from Cardiff University who specialise in this field to gather evidence from former and current Members about their experiences, to report on their findings and suggest areas for recommendations to strengthen our Senedd.

What happens next?

We have recommended establishing an implementation board in the Seventh Senedd to oversee the responses to, and implementation of, our recommendations.



OUR VISION



Representation and Participation: a Senedd that reflects the diversity of the people of Wales and removes barriers to participation in the Senedd's work; values diversity as a democratic strength; and embeds equality and inclusion into leadership, structures and decision-making.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish and resource an Implementation Board to maintain momentum.
- Require formal structures to sustain representative diversity.
- Collect demographic, participation data to inform decision-making.
- Consider changes to improve inclusivity in Committee composition.
- Equality impact assess changes to the electoral system and Seventh Senedd ways of working.



OUR VISION



Culture and Working

practices: enabling Members to participate fully in parliamentary life without personal exclusion. It values wellbeing, accessibility and dignity and respect alongside scrutiny and debate.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Re-affirm the Senedd as accessible, inclusive and family-friendly.
- Commit to having an onsite childcare provision (creche) which is a vital part of a family-friendly Senedd.
- Continue to use hybrid working and treat it as equal to in-person participation.
- Establish predictable Plenary finish times.
- Clarify parental leave, caring and emergency absence policies.
- Evaluate the strengthened induction and “Hwb” navigation support for Members.
- Progress the recommendations of the Standards of Conduct Committee on Dignity and Respect.
- Explore the potential for a Locum Member while a Member is unavailable e.g. on maternity leave.
- Endorse the principle of job-sharing as a way of promoting diversity and equality, and progress its examination at pace.

OUR VISION



Member Abuse: Members and those standing for office can participate in political life safely, confidently and without fear of abuse, intimidation or harassment.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Treat abuse as a democratic risk, not a norm.
- Continue to monitor social media and/or conduct online vulnerability assessments, including tackling abuse that falls below a ‘threatening’ threshold, and regularly report to the Senedd.
- Strengthen the prevention approach and Members’ understanding of reporting and the support available.
- Establish a Safe Participation in Politics Taskforce to address this area of risk to our democracy.

OUR VISION



Mainstreaming Equality:

A Senedd that is a world leader in putting equality at the heart of scrutiny and law-making and in our institutional structures.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Embed equalities in Standing Orders.
- Undertake an Equality Mainstreaming review of the Programme for Government.
- Every Senedd Committee routinely considers equalities in their scrutiny of Welsh Government policies and proposals and undertakes one Equality Mainstreaming Model engagement per Senedd term.
- Standing Orders should require that there be a dedicated Equality Committee and a women’s parliamentary caucus.
- Assign clear leadership for equality mainstreaming at Commission and official level.
- Ensure that there are appropriate training and resources in place to deliver our recommendations.

Contents

Chair’s foreword	12
Recommendation	15
1. Representation and participation.....	24
Our vision	24
Strengths.....	24
The evidence showed.....	24
What this means	26
Our view and recommendations for action	26
2. Culture and working practices.....	31
Our vision	31
Strengths.....	31
The evidence showed.....	32
What this means	33
Our view and recommendations for action	34
3. Abuse of Members.....	40
Our vision	40
Strengths.....	40
The evidence showed.....	40
What this means	41
Our view and recommendations for action	42

4. Equality mainstreaming	45
Our vision	45
Strengths.....	45
The evidence showed	45
What this means	46
Our view and recommendations for action	46
Annex 1 : Report of the Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review	51

Chair's foreword

The Senedd was, and is, a pioneer in family-friendly and inclusive working. The legislative foundation for equality has existed from the very start of Welsh devolution through the Government of Wales Act 1998. We have always known that a representative parliament is stronger, because it draws on a wider range of views, voices, and visions.

The Senedd is celebrated as a global leader in women's representation—representation has never been below 40% and we were the first legislature in the world to have a 50:50 split between men and women in 2003.

The Senedd has demonstrated its commitment to inclusive working practices, from proxy voting for parental leave and caring allowances for Members, and hybrid working.

The factors that led to this situation may not always be present. We want to make sure that our parliament has institutionalised ways of working that promote and advance equality, rather than relying on discretionary practices and individual champions to lead change.

That is why the timing of this review is critical. Decisions about business structures and working practices will be made over the next few months that will determine what kind of a parliament the Senedd is in the future. This is a crucial moment of risk and opportunity to shape the parliamentary culture.

This report draws on evidence and analysis from a review of the Senedd's culture, formal and informal rules, and systems for ensuring equality is promoted in its lawmaking undertaken during the autumn of 2025. The review was conducted in response to a recommendation from the Reform Bill Committee, in its scrutiny of the *Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill*. The Senedd Commission agreed to initiate the review, chaired by myself as the Senedd Commissioner with responsibility for Equalities.

The review, annexed to this report, not only assesses the institution from the viewpoint of elected Members, but also compares us to international standards of best practice. It shows that the Senedd compares well in terms of representation and participation, but more can be done to embed equality into leadership, and scrutiny.

We want to make sure the role of a Member of the Senedd is accessible and appealing to everyone. Members should not have to choose between their responsibilities to their families and their constituents.

People working in politics are increasingly facing an unprecedented amount of online and offline abuse, which is simply unacceptable. This Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review (FFIPR) Board report makes recommendations in many areas, but none are more critical than ensuring that people from diverse backgrounds who serve as elected representatives from across the political spectrum can engage with their constituents and do their job in safety and without fear.

Members represent the diversity of citizens in their scrutiny and lawmaking roles. Doing this work through an equality lens means making sure policy, laws, and budgets consider the experiences and needs of different people. This report shows that the Senedd has a strong foundation for equality mainstreaming, and sets out an ambitious vision for our parliament to become a world leader in this area through strategic leadership, training, expert analysis, and engagement with people with lived experience.

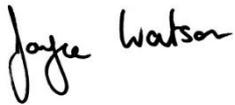
I thank my fellow Board Members – Peter Fox MS, Siân Gwenllïan MS, Jane Dodds MS, and Mike Hedges MS. Their collaborative approach is a perfect example of the way in which we can come together to debate and agree evidence-based recommendations for a stronger Welsh democracy.

We have greatly benefitted from the expertise of the academic team who carried out the review. I want to thank Dr Alison Parken, Dr Rachel Minto and Dr Leah Hibbs for their effort and dedication to producing their substantial report within challenging timescales. They succeeded in gathering, analysing and presenting a significant amount of primary evidence from our current and former Members their report is annexed below. This review benefitted greatly from the wealth of first-hand experience that Members kindly shared with the researchers.

Our immediate challenge is to make sure these insights turn into action. This review is a starting point, and the most important recommendation in it is to

establish an implementation board to drive and monitor the delivery of these much needed reforms.

We have so much to be proud of, and as we expand and change the ways we work, we cannot risk losing the progress we have made. We must build from the original vision for a devolved legislature that is both representative and inclusive. This is our opportunity to hard-wire these practices in to attract a diverse range of people to participate in Welsh politics.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joyce Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joyce Watson MS/AS

Recommendation

Recommendation 1. A Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament

Implementation Board is established, with cross-party representation, to oversee the implementation of the FFIPR’s recommendations with immediate effect and into the Seventh Senedd..... Page 28

Recommendation 2. A further Family-Friendly Inclusive Parliament Review is conducted during the Seventh Senedd, in a timeframe that provides for its scope to encompass political parties, Member’s staff, Senedd Commission services staff, and public engagement..... Page 28

Recommendation 3. The Senedd and Business Committee should ensure that any statutory review into the impact of the new electoral system as a result of Section 19 of The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 includes an assessment of its impact on diversity and inclusion. It should also consider any imbalances that have occurred and make recommendations for how these can be addressed..... Page 28

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should seek an Order in Council, under s. 109 of the **Government of Wales Act 2006**, calling for the devolution of competence in relation to legislation on measures to support diversity of electoral candidates, and laying the proposed Order under Standing Order 25. The Welsh Government should also consider any other legal routes that can be pursued in order to fulfil the Senedd’s majority support in favour of statutory mechanisms to achieve gender-balance amongst electoral candidates..... Page 28

Recommendation 5. Senedd Commission services should collect demographic data across all protected characteristics of Members of the Senedd on entering the Senedd to facilitate equalities analysis of representation. This should include indicators of socio-economic status (such as parents’ occupations, housing status, school attended) and intersectional analysis..... Page 28

Recommendation 6. Senedd Commission services should collect data on inclusivity in Plenary debates by protected characteristic. This should include contributions, interruptions, interventions and whether requests for interventions are accepted, and whether contributions are made in person or online and in Welsh or English. An annual review of participation data should be considered by Business Committee..... Page 28

Recommendation 7. Senedd Commission services should put in place an effective means of alerting the Llywydd immediately when a Member participating virtually online requests an intervention, for example a ‘Llywydd’s button’ – similar to that used in the Scottish Parliament..... Page 29

Recommendation 8. Business Committee should consider what changes can be made to Standing Orders to improve inclusivity on Committees. This would be based on: no single sex committees; and/ or the gender balance in each committee so far as is reasonably practical, reflecting the overall gender balance of Members representatives, or the gender balance once Cabinet roles have been removed from the calculation..... Page 29

Recommendation 9. The FFIPR Implementation Board should monitor any expansion in the number and size of committees in the Seventh Senedd and therefore the number of committees on which Members are expected to serve. Page 29

Recommendation 10. All committees should consider their evidence diversity data on an annual basis. Reports should be submitted to the Chairs’ Forum, which should continue to monitor the evidence diversity data annually. Page 29

Recommendation 11. Senedd Commission services should continue to provide ongoing training (staggered and repeated) on:

- the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd and the Dignity and Respect policy;
- the conventions and rules of conducting Senedd business, including participating in Plenary and Committee, with regard to interventions, interruptions and acceptable behaviour (including the way questions are asked);
- handling of staff grievances, including in relation to sexual harrasment and bullying;
- building resilience; and
- promoting equality and inclusion in interactions and in law-making.

..... Page

30

Recommendation 12. The Senedd Commission should report on the take up and effectiveness of the training to the Business Committee and Standards of Conduct Committee..... Page 30

Recommendation 13. The Senedd should commit to the principle of the Senedd as an accessible, inclusive and family-friendly institution..... Page 36

Recommendation 14. Business Committee should safeguard the option of virtual participation in Senedd Business in the next Senedd, affirming it as having the same value as in person attendance. There should be monitoring of whether the use of hybrid working impacts on women gaining promoted posts. Page 36

Recommendation 15. The Business Committee and Llywydd should actively involve the FFIPR Implementation Board in discussions on Seventh Senedd reform proposals to ensure that they are equality impact assessed before they are put to the Senedd for decision. This would include proposals on the planning of the business week, job share trials and other changes to the way Members do business. Any substantive changes should undergo ‘scenario testing’ using the lens of promoting family-friendly and inclusive working..... Page 36

Recommendation 16. Business Committee should establish a predictable and family-friendly end time for Plenary. Deviations from this end time should be exceptional, with advance notice provided to Members if sessions are likely to run beyond this time. There should be provision for business not reached by the end of one plenary session to carry over into the next plenary session. Business Committee should review data on plenary end times, in particular late sittings on a regular basis. Business Committee should consider it alongside the plenary participation monitoring data to enable consideration of the impact of plenary timings on participation.Page 37

Recommendation 17. Business Committee should establish a procedure for Members leaving Plenary in an emergency (with a specific definition of what constitutes an emergency). In the event of a Member having to leave in an emergency, the outcome of a vote should not be dependent on whether that Member could find a pairing at short notice.....Page 37

Recommendation 18. The Llywydd and Business Committee are invited to consider the introduction of a regular ‘Announcements’ agenda item at the start of each Plenary meeting which would give greater visibility to what Members’ may be experiencing in their personal lives. This is common practice in local

government and provides an opportunity for condolences, congratulations, and to acknowledge other personal matters.Page 37

Recommendation 19. Business Committee, in collaboration with political groups, should develop a definition of the role of a Chief Whip (as distinct from Business Manager). This may encompass matters such as legislative planning, parliamentary discipline and supporting the welfare of their group’s Members.Page 37

Recommendation 20. The Senedd Commission should:

- consider a summary of the evidence gathered in this review relating to Members’ experiences of seeking reimbursement of costs under the Determination, their understanding of the rules, and consider how best to address the issues raised in conjunction with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
- undertake regular Member experience journeys such as those undertaken early in the Sixth Senedd, to understand Members’ lived experiences, and identify areas of difficulty for Members and what might be causing these; and
- continue to ensure that claims relating to caring responsibilities are anonymised and aggregated to avoid individuals being identified and consider equalities matters when deciding on the policy relating to publication of costs. Page 38

Recommendation 21. The Senedd Commission services should continue to adopt a proactive approach in providing guidance and support on:

- setting up offices and hiring staff;
- the provision of reasonable adjustments in Senedd buildings, at events and at Members’ offices. Page 38

Recommendation 22. The Senedd Commission should commit to the principle of childcare provision in the Senedd for Members, staff and witnesses and - by at least the first year of the Seventh Senedd - have explored and developed all options. There should be a dedicated room for breastfeeding..... Page 38

Recommendation 23. Based on a proposal from the Llywydd, the Senedd should affirm a parental leave policy, encompassing maternity, paternity, adoption and miscarriage leave. This would be based upon:

- discussion between political groups, and
- informed by both:
 - Business Committee considerations;
 - discussion with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
 - Senedd Commission services having identified best practice in relation to taking leave, including that in other Parliaments.

This policy would:

- encompass how the health and safety arrangements for pregnant Members are covered in relation to working in and outside of the Senedd, including any property, staff or services required in;
- provide guidance to Members in deciding appropriate leave length and other arrangements; and
- encompass existing relevant procedural matters such as proxy voting – including the maximum length of time available for use of proxy voting.
..... Page 39

Recommendation 24. Following the agreement of this policy, Senedd Commission services should make information and guidance available on it to Members and take steps to publicise it. The Senedd Commission services should also provide for a person(s) that Members can contact for guidance on sensitive issues related to this policy. Members should also be able to seek guidance on relevant aspects of the Independent Remuneration Board’s Determination (such as the allowance for extra staff to cover work). Page 39

Recommendation 25. If a committee is established under section 7 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act, to explore the possibility of job sharing of roles in the future, it should explore the potential for a Locum Member being able to undertake the full range of a Member’s work, including Senedd business, while a Member is unavailable..... Page 39

Recommendation 26. The Senedd Commission should conduct interviews or a survey with all Members who have stood down or are not returned to the Seventh Senedd during summer 2026. This should include questions regarding their experiences of violence, abuse, and harassment, and exploring the factors which influenced their decisions not to re-stand, including any caring responsibilities.

..... Page 39

Recommendation 27. That a motion is tabled in the next Senedd, by the Llywydd (or other lead member), to give directions that the Senedd Commission must address the issue of online abuse of Members, and report to the Senedd on the effectiveness of its approach on an annual basis. This must include undertaking social media monitoring and/or online vulnerability assessments, and should keep pace with technological innovations. It should encompass identifying and tackling abuse that falls below a ‘threatening’ threshold but is still abusive and a threat to democracy.....Page 42

Recommendation 28. The Senedd Commission should consider how to build upon its preventative approach to security. This would include reviewing its security provisions and protocols in correspondence with the Standards of Conduct Committee’s proposal for a Guardian role. It would include ensuring clear, consistent guidance is easily available to Members to aid their understanding of processes for reporting, preventing, and responding to offline and online abuse, and violence from the public. It is also vital that communications regarding security go to all Members.....Page 42

Recommendation 29. The FFIPR Implementation Board should engage with the Standards of Conduct Committee, and its successor in the next Senedd, particularly in relation to:

- the proposal for a single point of contact for guidance, advice and practical support related to all types of harassment and abuse, (from the public and those within the Senedd) for Members, Support Staff and Commission staff;
- the proposals for a “Guardian Role”, a semi-independent advisor (similar to the NHS model) for dignity and respect; and
- the evaluation of the “Members’ Hwb” which is to be carried out by the Senedd Commission. Page 43

Recommendation 30. The Senedd Commission should establish a ‘Safe Participation in Politics’ Taskforce to oversee and commission ongoing work regarding abuse and harassment of Members. The Taskforce should:

- Commission an Independent Review and Report on the Abuse and Harassment of Members of the Senedd and their political staff and ongoing monitoring and reporting on actions to address the issue of online abuse of Members, including data collected by the social media monitoring project pilot;
- work with the Electoral Commission to assess the damage caused by violence, abuse, and harassment of politicians, to public engagement and, in turn, to democracy; and
- work with the FFIPR Implementation Board, Standards of Conduct Committee and Senedd Commission to advise on a publicly available ‘Unacceptable behaviour of Citizens Policy’ and ‘Social Media Policy’. It should consider how these would be enforced, so that citizens who engage in abuse of Members face repercussions for their action.

..... Page 43

Recommendation 31. Every Committee should routinely include scrutiny of equality evidence in its inquiries. The Chair’s Forum and the Senedd Commission services should support this, by providing a toolkit including, for example: an equalities checklist for Terms of Reference, equality mainstreaming guidance, disaggregated data, internal and external equalities expertise, and witness diversity guidance/data. The Chair’s Forum should routinely review the effectiveness of the approach..... Page 48

Recommendation 32. Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a dedicated Equality Committee or with specific remit or functions in relation to oversight of equalities. This does not displace the duty on other committees to take responsibility for mainstreaming equalities scrutiny in their work, as noted above. Page 48

Recommendation 33. The Welsh Government should be required to inform the relevant committee when a Bill’s equality impact assessment is published.
..... Page 48

Recommendation 34. Senedd Committees should request that the Senedd Commission’s Research Service provide an equalities mainstreaming review of each Bill that they scrutinise..... Page 48

Recommendation 35. The Committee with responsibility for equalities should utilise the Senedd Commission’s Research Service to undertake, or commission through the Academic Fellowship Scheme, an Equality Mainstreaming review of the Programme for Government. This desk review would assess the potential for the Programme to ameliorate existing inequalities. The review to then be considered by the committee with responsibility for equalities, who would disseminate advice to the other committees. Page 48

Recommendation 36. Each committee should undertake one Equality Mainstreaming Model engagement during a four-year term. The Senedd Commission should ensure that its Services have appropriate capacity to support the committee’s engagement with an Equality Mainstreaming Panel (including equality organisations, trades unions, think tanks, sector bodies as relevant to the policy area working with the committee on the evidence-gathering and solution-focused processes)..... Page 49

Recommendation 37. The Senedd Commission should provide regular equalities mainstreaming scrutiny training for Members. Page 49

Recommendation 38. The Senedd Commission ensures it has appropriate resources and budget for additional equality-related research as required. Page 49

Recommendation 39. That the Welsh Government consider creating a Mainstreaming Equality Duty, as part of its suite of Welsh Specific Equality Duties, The Mainstreaming Duty would require public services in Wales to report every three years on how mainstreaming equality within their organisations has improved leadership, operational functions, policymaking for equality, the equitable delivery of public services, and meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and Welsh Specific Equality Duties. Page 49

Recommendation 40. The committee with responsibility for equalities should seek an assessment of the Senedd’s legislative competence in relation to equality and human rights, in particular the potential to devolve responsibility for the operation and monitoring of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to the Welsh Government. The review should also consider, whether, in the event of the Equality Act ever being repealed, the Senedd would have competence to

legislate to impose duties on public authorities (in comparable fashion to Welsh Ministers' existing powers under the Equality Act 2010)..... Page 49

Recommendation 41. Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a women's parliamentary caucus composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda..... Page 50

Recommendation 42. The Senedd Commission should continue to determine that one Commissioner has responsibility for equality of opportunity in the future. Page 50

Recommendation 43. The Senedd Commission to designate a Senior Commission Official to lead the Senedd Commission services' work on equality mainstreaming [including the requirements under GOWA 2006 sch.2 s8(1) that the Senedd Commission must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people]. Page 50

1. Representation and participation

Our vision

We see a Senedd that reflects the diversity of the people of Wales and removes barriers to participation in the Senedd's work.

We see an institution that values and promotes diversity as a democratic strength, embeds equality into leadership, structures and decision-making and is seen as a leader in inclusive politics and collaborative policy-making.

Strengths

"The Senedd has a strong international reputation in terms of representation for women. It has sustained high levels of women's representation compared with global and UK norms. It was the first legislature in the world to see an equal Membership of women and men in 2003. Female Membership has never fallen below 40%.

It has a strong track record of women in leadership roles, such as Presiding Officer, Committee Chairs, Cabinet Members and First Minister.

The Senedd also gathers evidence on the diversity of people and organisations that contribute to committees in an effort to increase the diversity of voices being heard in scrutiny and lawmaking."

The evidence showed

- The Senedd's proportion of female Membership and in leadership positions is a success story.
- Since the third Assembly, there has always been at least one woman in the role of either Llywydd (Presiding Officer) or Deputy Presiding Officer at any one time.
- In the Welsh Government, women have occupied six of the nine Cabinet roles for most of the devolved government, and the current cabinet is led by a majority of women and a female First Minister. In 2024, the first

Black leader of a European nation was sworn in as First Minister, followed by the first female First Minister of Wales.

- Committee Chairs (allocated in proportion to political groups' representation in the Senedd) are important leadership roles within the Senedd. The evidence shows that participation gaps and gendered patterns remain, with some committees becoming male or female dominated. There are some examples of single-sex committees. Overall, most Chairs have been men. Strategic and cross-cutting committees such as the Finance Committee, Legislation and Justice Committee (or Constitutional Committee) remain male dominated.
- Some Members expressed concerns that efforts to sustain diverse representation, such as the introduction of gender quotas for Senedd elections - had not progressed.¹
- While there were limitations to the data available on Plenary debates, analysis indicated that women Members were making a disproportionately higher number of contributions, and the level of interruptions of women and men received was in line with their representation in the Chamber. The Llywydd's management of Plenary debates, in ensuring equal participation, and acting with impartiality was commended.
- While the culture of political debate is less adversarial than that of the House of Commons, Members were concerned that there was a cultural drift from deliberative, collaborative debate towards a more performative, point-scoring, style. Quieter or more deliberative styles, often associated with women are perceived as being less valued.
- It was felt that it was more difficult to be recognised when participating online, and practical solutions were suggested for this.
- Unlike other legislatures, the Senedd Commission collects data on those who give written and oral evidence to committees.
- Electoral candidates self-fund their campaigns and may also need to reduce working hours whilst campaigning. Standing for election can

¹ Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidates Bill), withdrawn in 2024.

therefore be out of the reach of people on low incomes or without additional sources of funding.

What this means

- There has been much to celebrate in Wales with respect to the representation of women in the legislature. However, the research found that there is a lack of data on the representation of Members with other protected characteristics, meaning it is difficult to provide similar analysis on these issues.
- Much has been dependent on individual champions, decisions taken within political parties and electoral outcomes rather than institutional requirements in legislation or Standing Orders. Depending on electoral outcomes, the Senedd may not see such a high proportion of female Members in future. The gains seen are therefore vulnerable to political and personnel change.
- There is limited reference to equality and inclusion considerations in the Senedd's Standing Orders. In particular, there are no requirements relating to ensuring that these matters are considered in the membership and chairing of committees.
- A cultural drift towards performative, adversarial politics risks undermining inclusion.

There is currently no data on Plenary participation for Members taking part online. As those with caring responsibilities may be more likely to take part virtually, it would be beneficial to gather evidence about the nature of this participation.

Our view and recommendations for action

- 1.** We have recommended a range of measures to help embed practices that ensure the Senedd represents the people it serves, and to build upon the analysis, discussion and evidence gathered in this review. This includes the establishment of an implementation board to oversee our recommendations in the next Senedd and continue the momentum of the work which has started with this review.
- 2.** There is a risk that without formal mechanisms for ensuring the Membership represents the electorate, the Senedd may be a less representative decision-

making body in future. This is why we are calling on the Welsh Government to write to the Secretary of State for Wales to clarify the legislative settlement on this issue, and as appropriate, seek the devolution of powers to allow for measures to support a diversity of electoral candidates.²

3. We are also calling for an assessment of the effect of the new electoral system on diversity and inclusion.

4. Importantly, we are calling for the collection of data on the protected characteristics of Members, to ensure that interventions to support diversity and inclusion are better-informed. We noted that limited data, if any, was collected on the protected characteristics of Members' Support Staff. This would also be needed to underpin any family-friendly and inclusive review relating to Support Staff.

5. The Board would like to explore ways of ensuring that there are no single sex committees and that the gender balance on committees reflects the Membership as far as possible. The Board has written to the Business Committee to draw this to its attention during the time it was finalising its procedural review ahead of the Seventh Senedd. The FFIPR implementation board should monitor the make-up of committees in the Seventh Senedd with the aim of having a wider range of voices contributing to committee work across all policy portfolios.

6. The nature of the debate in the Senedd Siambr reflects who we are as a Parliament, who is listened to and what behaviour is acceptable. We aspire to an institution where participation in Plenary, committees and scrutiny is fair, inclusive and respectful, and where different styles of contribution are recognised and valued. We recognise the importance of the training that Senedd Commission services arrange for Members to this end and recommend that this is evaluated in due course.

7. It is also worth noting that in our consideration of the evidence gathered in this report, we discussed the possibility of calling for regular breaks in proceedings. However, we believe the Llywydd and Committee Chairs are best placed to recognise when breaks in proceedings are needed. We also noted specific examples when breaks have been utilised in the past, for instance when sign language interpretation is being used or in lengthy stage 3 legislative proceedings.

² A majority of the Board agreed this recommendation. One Member of the Board, Peter Fox MS, did not agree this recommendation.

Recommendation 1. A Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Implementation Board is established, with cross-party representation, to oversee the implementation of the FFIPR’s recommendations with immediate effect and into the Seventh Senedd.³

Recommendation 2. A further Family-Friendly Inclusive Parliament Review is conducted during the Seventh Senedd, in a timeframe that provides for its scope to encompass political parties, Member’s staff, Senedd Commission services staff, and public engagement.

Recommendation 3. The Senedd and Business Committee should ensure that any statutory review into the impact of the new electoral system as a result of Section 19 of The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 includes an assessment of its impact on diversity and inclusion. It should also consider any imbalances that have occurred and make recommendations for how these can be addressed.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should seek an Order in Council, under s. 109 of the [Government of Wales Act 2006](#), calling for the devolution of competence in relation to legislation on measures to support diversity of electoral candidates, and laying the proposed Order under Standing Order 25. The Welsh Government should also consider any other legal routes that can be pursued in order to fulfil the Senedd’s majority support in favour of statutory mechanisms to achieve gender-balance amongst electoral candidates.⁴

Recommendation 5. Senedd Commission services should collect demographic data across all protected characteristics of Members of the Senedd on entering the Senedd to facilitate equalities analysis of representation. This should include indicators of socio-economic status (such as parents’ occupations, housing status, school attended) and intersectional analysis.

Recommendation 6. Senedd Commission services should collect data on inclusivity in Plenary debates by protected characteristic. This should include contributions, interruptions, interventions and whether requests for interventions are accepted, and whether contributions are made in person or online and in

³ A majority of the Board agreed this recommendation. One Member of the Board, Peter Fox MS, did not agree this recommendation.

⁴ A majority of the Board agreed this recommendation. One Member of the Board, Peter Fox MS, did not agree this recommendation.

Welsh or English. An annual review of participation data should be considered by Business Committee.⁵

Recommendation 7. Senedd Commission services should put in place an effective means of alerting the Llywydd immediately when a Member participating virtually online requests an intervention, for example a ‘Llywydd’s button’ – similar to that used in the Scottish Parliament.

Recommendation 8. Business Committee should consider what changes can be made to Standing Orders to improve inclusivity on Committees. This would be based on: no single sex committees; and/or the gender balance in each committee so far as is reasonably practical, reflecting the overall gender balance of Members representatives, or the gender balance once Cabinet roles have been removed from the calculation.

Recommendation 9. The FFIPR Implementation Board should monitor any expansion in the number and size of committees in the Seventh Senedd and therefore the number of committees on which Members are expected to serve.

Recommendation 10. All committees should consider their evidence diversity data on an annual basis. Reports should be submitted to the Chairs’ Forum, which should continue to monitor the evidence diversity data annually.

Recommendation 11. Senedd Commission services should continue to provide ongoing training (staggered and repeated) on:

- the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd and the Dignity and Respect policy;
- the conventions and rules of conducting Senedd business, including participating in Plenary and Committee, with regard to interventions, interruptions and acceptable behaviour (including the way questions are asked);
- handling of staff grievances, including in relation to sexual harassment and bullying;

⁵ We note that in the Scottish Parliament, an exercise was previously conducted over a six-week period between April and June 2022 to capture real-time data on the number of attempted interventions, the number of interventions accepted and not accepted and the gender split of data. However, we are also conscious that technology or AI may provide solutions rather than necessarily dedicating the Senedd Commission services’ staff resources to record the data.

- building resilience; and
- promoting equality and inclusion in interactions and in law-making.

Recommendation 12. The Senedd Commission should report on the take up and effectiveness of the training to the Business Committee and Standards of Conduct Committee.

2. Culture and working practices

Our vision

We see a Senedd whose culture and working practices enable Members to participate fully in parliamentary life without personal exclusion or undue strain.

We see a Senedd whose ways of working are predictable, inclusive and family-friendly, valuing wellbeing, accessibility and dignity and respect alongside scrutiny and debate. It embeds equality into how Senedd business is planned and delivered, and is welcoming and open to people with diverse circumstances and caring responsibilities.

Strengths

“The Senedd is rightly proud of its history of initiating and normalising the principle of family-friendly working practices which is reflected in its Standing Orders.

The ability to work remotely and the opportunity to request a proxy vote for planned periods of absence for up to seven months, mean that Members have flexibility when trying to meet their responsibilities to their parties, constituents and families.

The Independent Remuneration Board, which sets Members’ pay and allowances, leads the way in terms of the provision of “out-of-hours” childcare costs, by ensuring that in future these can be claimed during recess periods and on weekends as well as in the evenings. The Board has also enhanced the provision for Members’ dependents to travel, as well as enabling eligible Members to accommodate additional dependents at their accommodation in Cardiff.

Members who are taking parental leave⁶ can claim the cost of employing an additional staff member for continuity in the

⁶ This includes maternity leave or paternity leave prior to the birth of a child; maternity leave or paternity leave to care for a child less than 12 months old; and adoption leave to care for a child during the first 12 months following adoption.

performance of the Member's duties (other than those which relate to formal Senedd business) for up to a 12 months."

The evidence showed

- Members' time is stretched by the business of the Senedd, constituency and party.
- During the time this review was carried out, Standing Orders (the rules that set out how business is conducted) stipulate that Senedd business should have regard to family and constituency responsibilities of Members, which means not starting before 9.00am or finishing after 6.00pm. However, there has been a steady increase in late sittings.
- Members are autonomous elected public office holders. They are not employees of the Commission. Notably some Members reported that they felt there was a lack of clear and consistent advice on maternity/ paternity/ adoption/miscarriage leave, and requested more information about precedents for taking leave. Political parties also have a key role to play in providing guidance and support to Members on this issue.
- Some Members were not aware that claims for caring costs are published on an aggregated and anonymous basis. Their concern that these claims would be in the public domain has, in some cases, discouraged them from taking up this facility.
- Members who were the main carer reported waiting until their children were at least young adults before seeking election to the Senedd.
- Some Members reported that they were surprised and disappointed that there is no onsite childcare facility and that having such a facility would send a strong message about the Senedd's commitment to inclusive democracy. Others did not specify the need for an onsite crèche, just that there should be provision to meet Members' needs. The Senedd Commission is continuing to explore the options for meeting these needs.
- Many Members appreciated the ability to participate in Senedd business remotely, and said in some cases it was the only way they could do their job and meet their caring responsibilities.

- Some Members cited instances where the accessibility of the estate had been inadequate. They also wanted more advice about what kinds of reasonable adjustments they could make for their staff, and how to ensure that reasonable adjustments were available at outside meetings and events.
- Members feel under pressure when they are first elected. Particularly in the first few weeks, there is an immediate need to hire staff, find an office, go through an intensive induction, and understand the demands of their new role.
- Members felt that sometimes the rules and their experience of seeking to claim business expenses added to the pressure they felt.
- During the time of the review being carried out, proposals for changes to the Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances ('the Determination') were being consulted on by the Independent Remuneration Board. The Independent Remuneration Board has committed to evaluate the Seventh Senedd Determination, following its implementation.

What this means

- The unpredictability of late sittings makes it difficult for Members to juggle their caring responsibilities with their work.
- Members are unsure about what would be an appropriate length of time to spend on maternity/ paternity / adoption leave. Their status as an elected public office holder (rather than as an employee) means that there is no comprehensive policy in place for Members to refer to and this can cause additional worry at a sensitive time.
- Members' ability to participate in Senedd business online has proved extremely beneficial in helping them to meet the demands of work and family life, but some Members felt that effective scrutiny, especially of Government Ministers, was better in person.
- Some Members expressed concern that those with primary caring responsibilities, who are most likely to use hybrid facilities, may miss out on in-person networking opportunities with colleagues. This may become a barrier to promotion in future.

- Some Members were reluctant to claim the caring costs they are entitled to, and therefore, may be financially penalised due to incurring additional costs as a result of long the working hours of their job.

Our view and recommendations for action

- 8.** The Board would like to see a reaffirmation of the Senedd's institutional commitment to being an inclusive and family-friendly parliament.
- 9.** The Board noted that Members have asked for more guidance on what constitutes a suitable length of time to take as maternity, paternity and adoption leave. The Board also discussed the need for Members to be able to take leave in the event of a miscarriage. Currently, there is no single "parental leave policy" for Members, as there is in other in public sector organisations as they are not "employees". For instance, Members have asked for an indication of the length of time others have taken as leave, as an indicator of what is acceptable.
- 10.** There is space here for political groups, who also fulfil a welfare role for their Members, to come together with other decision-makers, such as the Independent Remuneration Board that sets the pay and allowances for Members, the Business Committee, who decide the rules, such as those on Proxy Voting, and the Senedd Commission services who give health and safety advice to consider and agree guidance. Also, the Chief Whips (as distinct from Business Managers) of political parties can play an important role in supporting Members' welfare, but the role would benefit from being more clearly defined to facilitate sharing and understanding of good practice.
- 11.** The Board noted the ways in which the Senedd's working practices enable Members to juggle their many commitments and cope with the long working hours. Undoubtedly the use of hybrid working has been beneficial to parents and carers, especially with the increase in late sittings during the Sixth Senedd.
- 12.** Even with the ability to work remotely, to claim for caring costs and travel and accommodation for dependents, and to ask for a proxy vote, a culture of longer and later working-hours challenges Members' ability to fulfil their personal and professional responsibilities equally.
- 13.** The Board recognises that there are some existing good procedures and practices in relation to pairing and proxy voting and believes that it is necessary to address the wider circumstance where a Member needs to leave Plenary at short

notice in the event of a personal emergency. The outcome of a vote should not be dependent on whether that Member could find a pairing at short notice.

14. Senedd Commission services provide guidance to Members about their role and many responsibilities, including as employers. They undertake extensive engagement with Members as part of the induction process to support them to understand their roles and offer on-going support and training. The Chief Executive and Clerk of the Commission has welcomed the evidence gathered in this review as an opportunity to help Senedd Commission services in their daily task of providing such guidance and support to Members.

15. We note that Senedd Commission services have listened to Members' feedback on the difficulty of knowing who to speak to on some issues and is establishing a Members' Hwb to provide in-person support for directing Members' queries to the right place so they can access the support they need more easily.

16. It is the responsibility of the Senedd Commission services to publish Members' claims for their business costs. In order to ensure that Members are not financially worse off as a result of additional caring costs for late sittings, we are recommending that the Senedd Commission services continue to ensure that caring claims are anonymised and aggregated to avoid individuals being identified.

17. The provision of onsite childcare, including ad hoc provision for visitors to the building and committee witnesses, and a dedicated room for breastfeeding, would signal the type of institution we want to be - an inclusive space that welcomes children. We note that the Inter-Parliamentary Union has recommended that parliamentary buildings should have 'special rooms for breastfeeding mothers, a childcare centre or a family room'.⁷ We welcome the continuing work which the Senedd Commission is undertaking in considering options for childcare.

18. Likewise, the accessibility of the estate for Members, staff and visitors is of paramount importance. We believe that concerns about a lack of clarity over reasonable adjustments for constituency events, ensuring offices and the estate is fully accessible must be addressed proactively.

19. Feedback on the Determination and the demands of the job in the early weeks are both areas in which the Senedd Commission services and the

⁷ Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit | Inter-Parliamentary Union

Independent Remuneration Board have listened to Members and implemented changes as a result, in advance of the Seventh Senedd. The Board notes the Senedd Commission's commitment to evaluating the effectiveness of the Members' Hwb.

20. The Board also notes that some Members who participated in the research may not have been aware of certain key Determination policy changes for the Seventh Senedd which the Independent Remuneration Board will be finalising in Spring 2026.

21. The Board therefore welcomes the Independent Remuneration Board's commitment to evaluate the Seventh Senedd Determination, following its implementation, and encourages it to consider equalities as a key part of its review. The Independent Remuneration Board is statutorily independent of the Senedd and is not subject to its direction or the direction of the Senedd Commission. However, we would encourage the FFIPR implementation board to engage with the Remuneration Board, as it evaluates the impact of its changes to the Determination. We will share a summary of the evidence of Members' experiences gathered by the academics during this Review with the Independent Remuneration Board to inform its evaluation.

Recommendation 13. The Senedd should commit to the principle of the Senedd as an accessible, inclusive and family-friendly institution.

Recommendation 14. Business Committee should safeguard the option of virtual participation in Senedd Business in the next Senedd, affirming it as having the same value as in person attendance. There should be monitoring of whether the use of hybrid working impacts on women gaining promoted posts.⁸

Recommendation 15. The Business Committee and Llywydd should actively involve the FFIPR Implementation Board in discussions on Seventh Senedd reform proposals to ensure that they are equality impact assessed before they are put to the Senedd for decision. This would include proposals on the planning of the business week, job share trials and other changes to the way Members do

⁸ One Member, Peter Fox MS, agreed with the recommendation but felt that the default position should be that Senedd business is conducted in-person. In his view, this would better meet public expectations and recognise the value of personal interactions in the Senedd environment. His view is that Members should be able to participate virtually when it is necessary and it falls within an acceptable set of reasons. When this is the case, in-person and online participation should be treated equally.

business. Any substantive changes should undergo ‘scenario testing’ using the lens of promoting family-friendly and inclusive working.

Recommendation 16. Business Committee should establish a predictable and family-friendly end time for Plenary. Deviations from this end time should be exceptional, with advance notice provided to Members if sessions are likely to run beyond this time. There should be provision for business not reached by the end of one plenary session to carry over into the next plenary session. Business Committee should review data on plenary end times, in particular late sittings on a regular basis. Business Committee should consider it alongside the plenary participation monitoring data to enable consideration of the impact of plenary timings on participation.

Recommendation 17. Business Committee should establish a procedure for Members leaving Plenary in an emergency (with a specific definition of what constitutes an emergency). In the event of a Member having to leave in an emergency, the outcome of a vote should not be dependent on whether that Member could find a pairing at short notice.

Recommendation 18. The Llywydd and Business Committee are invited to consider the introduction of a regular ‘Announcements’ agenda item at the start of each Plenary meeting which would give greater visibility to what Members’ may be experiencing in their personal lives. This is common practice in local government and provides an opportunity for condolences, congratulations, and to acknowledge other personal matters.

Recommendation 19. Business Committee, in collaboration with political groups, should develop a definition of the role of a Chief Whip (as distinct from Business Manager). This may encompass matters such as legislative planning, parliamentary discipline and supporting the welfare of their group’s Members.

Recommendation 20. The Senedd Commission should:

- consider a summary of the evidence gathered in this review relating to Members’ experiences of seeking reimbursement of costs under the Determination, their understanding of the rules, and consider how best to address the issues raised in conjunction with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
- undertake regular Member experience journeys such as those undertaken early in the Sixth Senedd, to understand Members’ lived

experiences, and identify areas of difficulty for Members and what might be causing these; and

- continue to ensure that claims relating to caring responsibilities are anonymised and aggregated to avoid individuals being identified and consider equalities matters when deciding on the policy relating to publication of costs.

Recommendation 21. The Senedd Commission services should continue to adopt a proactive approach in providing guidance and support on:

- setting up offices and hiring staff;
- the provision of reasonable adjustments in Senedd buildings, at events and at Members' offices.

Recommendation 22. The Senedd Commission should commit to the principle of childcare provision in the Senedd for Members, staff and witnesses and - by at least the first year of the Seventh Senedd - have explored and developed all options. There should be a dedicated room for breastfeeding.

Recommendation 23. Based on a proposal from the Llywydd, the Senedd should affirm a parental leave policy, encompassing maternity, paternity, adoption and miscarriage leave. This would be based upon:

- discussion between political groups, and
- informed by both:
 - Business Committee considerations;
 - discussion with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
 - Senedd Commission services having identified best practice in relation to taking leave, including that in other Parliaments.

This policy would:

- encompass how the health and safety arrangements for pregnant Members are covered in relation to working in and outside of the Senedd, including any property, staff or services required in;

- provide guidance to Members in deciding appropriate leave length and other arrangements; and
- encompass existing relevant procedural matters such as proxy voting – including the maximum length of time available for use of proxy voting.

Recommendation 24. Following the agreement of this policy, Senedd Commission services should make information and guidance available on it to Members and take steps to publicise it. The Senedd Commission services should also provide for a person(s) that Members can contact for guidance on sensitive issues related to this policy. Members should also be able to seek guidance on relevant aspects of the Independent Remuneration Board’s Determination (such as the allowance for extra staff to cover work).

Recommendation 25. If a committee is established under section 7 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act, to explore the possibility of job sharing of roles in the future, it should explore the potential for a Locum Member being able to undertake the full range of a Member’s work, including Senedd business, while a Member is unavailable.

Recommendation 26. The Senedd Commission should conduct interviews or a survey with all Members who have stood down or are not returned to the Seventh Senedd during summer 2026. This should include questions regarding their experiences of violence, abuse, and harassment, and exploring the factors which influenced their decisions not to re-stand, including any caring responsibilities.

3. Abuse of Members

Our vision

We see a Senedd where Members and those standing for office can participate in political life safely, confidently and without fear of abuse, intimidation or harassment.

Strengths

“Members valued the advice and security measures provided by the Senedd Commission and police. Members are provided with personal security equipment, such as alarms, cameras, one way office window glass and secure doors They can have assessments of their homes and offices and can be accompanied by security personnel at public events.

The Senedd Commission is undertaking a pilot project to monitor online abuse. Participants and their staff do not have to report online abuse, their social media is monitored and the software used tracks persistent abusers, and threats which meet the definition of criminal activity are dealt with by the police.

All Members are required to follow a Code of Conduct in their behaviour during and outside working hours.”

The evidence showed

- Members reported they had suffered from in-person and online abuse from the public. Almost all current Members interviewed mentioned having received some form of abuse or harassment online, or knew someone who had.
- The in-person abuse included property damage, harassment and disruption of events.
- For women Members, the abuse is often gendered, and more prevalent and sustained (this includes threats of rape or abuse based on their appearance or clothing).

- Members reported that women, young people, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds had told them that they particularly fear that they would receive abuse if they became politicians and that this discouraged them from standing.
- Members feel they have to be resilient to such abuse, to downplay it as a 'cost of doing politics'.
- Members' families are also affected. Members are worried about their children becoming victims of harassment or bullying in school or seeing the abuse of their parent online.
- Members' staff are at the frontline of this abuse: they are reading, monitoring and screening social media posts and open abusive emails. This could take a significant toll on their mental health.
- Some Members also reported abuse and harassment from other Members and support staff, including incidents when other Members were perceived to have 'gone too far' in their language and behaviour. It was recognised that there is a balance between the requirement for free speech and ensuring the rules of dignity and respect are upheld (this is also discussed and addressed in Chapter 2 and Recommendation 11).

What this means

- The prevalence of abuse has forced some Members to alter their ways of working and decisions in their personal social lives. Multiple interviewees spoke about no longer advertising where they would be for public events or engagements, and many said that they now no longer held to hold in-person, drop-in public surgeries in their constituencies.
- Members also reported they felt their likelihood of receiving abuse, particularly online, was increased when they publicly spoke out on, or championed equalities issues and policy areas.
- Often Members' staff are unprepared for the nature of the content, resulting in stress and anxiety that is unjustifiable in their role.
- Online abuse does not respect normal working hours, and the need to check social media whilst at home, means it affects the well-being of the entire household.

- In some cases the experience had influenced the decision of Members about whether to stand for re-election. For at least one Member, the scale of abuse had been central to her decision not to stand for re-election, the data showed that this had featured in decisions to stand down, meaning we risk losing experienced politicians.
- This has a negative effect on the diversity of those who choose to be involved in politics.

Our view and recommendations for action

22. The Board is very concerned that all Members taking part in the review had experienced online abuse, and that many had also experienced abuse in-person. The extent of the abuse is such that Members have become desensitised to it, normalised it, and consider it to be an unavoidable part of their roles.

23. This was the area of most concern to the Board. No one should be expected to put up with threats, intimidation, and fear as part of their job. We recognise a danger that it could lead to a degradation of the quality and scope of political debate, and that this threatens our democracy.

24. The Board welcomes the Senedd Commission's commitment to supporting Members to address the issue of online abuse, through its evaluation of the pilot, and by learning from effective parliamentary processes elsewhere. The Board is making a recommendation to ensure that this continues to be a priority in the next Senedd under the leadership of a new Commission. The Board is encouraged that Senedd Commission Services have extended the pilot and, as a consequence, there will not be a gap in social media monitoring between the end of the Sixth Senedd and the beginning of the Seventh Senedd.

Recommendation 27. That a motion is tabled in the next Senedd, by the Llywydd (or other lead member), to give directions that the Senedd Commission must address the issue of online abuse of Members, and report to the Senedd on the effectiveness of its approach on an annual basis. This must include undertaking social media monitoring and/or online vulnerability assessments, and should keep pace with technological innovations. It should encompass identifying and tackling abuse that falls below a 'threatening' threshold but is still abusive and a threat to democracy.

Recommendation 28. The Senedd Commission should consider how to build upon its preventative approach to security. This would include reviewing its

security provisions and protocols in correspondence with the Standards of Conduct Committee's proposal for a Guardian role. It would include ensuring clear, consistent guidance is easily available to Members to aid their understanding of processes for reporting, preventing, and responding to offline and online abuse, and violence from the public. It is also vital that communications regarding security go to all Members.

Recommendation 29. The FFIPR Implementation Board should engage with the Standards of Conduct Committee, and its successor in the next Senedd, particularly in relation to:

- the proposal for a single point of contact for guidance, advice and practical support related to all types of harassment and abuse, (from the public and those within the Senedd) for Members, Support Staff and Commission staff;
- the proposals for a “Guardian Role”, a semi-independent advisor (similar to the NHS model) for dignity and respect; and
- the evaluation of the “Members’ Hwb” which is to be carried out by the Senedd Commission.

Recommendation 30. The Senedd Commission should establish a ‘Safe Participation in Politics’ Taskforce⁹ to oversee and commission ongoing work regarding abuse and harassment of Members. The Taskforce should:

- Commission an Independent Review and Report on the Abuse and Harassment of Members of the Senedd and their political staff and ongoing monitoring and reporting on actions to address the issue of online abuse of Members, including data collected by the social media monitoring project pilot;
- work with the Electoral Commission to assess the damage caused by violence, abuse, and harassment of politicians, to public engagement and, in turn, to democracy; and
- work with the FFIPR Implementation Board, Standards of Conduct Committee and Senedd Commission to advise on a publicly available

⁹ We envision that this would be comprised of Senedd Members, Senedd Commission Staff (including Senedd Security), Political Staff, external experts, Welsh police forces, and other key actors.

‘Unacceptable behaviour of Citizens Policy’ and ‘Social Media Policy’.¹⁰ It should consider how these would be enforced, so that citizens who engage in abuse of Members face repercussions for their action.

¹⁰ The Senedd Commission publishes “Social media house rules” on the Senedd website which apply when posting to any of the social media channels for which the Senedd Commission has responsibility.

<https://senedd.wales/help/social-media-community-guidelines/>

4. Equality mainstreaming

Our vision

We see a Senedd that is a world leader in equality mainstreaming. With strong structures, evidence and leadership, it systematically puts equality at the heart of scrutiny and lawmaking. The Senedd contributes to the achievement of more equal outcomes for the people of Wales by considering the different needs, experiences, and outcomes for different people when making laws and scrutinising government actions and spending.

Strengths

“The Senedd has a uniquely Welsh way of promoting equality through mainstreaming. The legislation underpinning devolution enshrined the principle of promoting equality of opportunity for all people. The approach to mainstreaming equality in Wales is proactive - it seeks to promote equality during the whole of the decision-making process, rather than negative impacts afterwards.

Senedd Research provide ad hoc training, guidance and analysis on equalities considerations to scrutiny committees and Members.”

The evidence showed

- Currently, Members do not systemically consider equality across all scrutiny work and debates.
- The Equality and Social Justice Committee has been critical to promoting an equalities agenda. Establishing a stand-alone committee with this responsibility, is not currently required in the Senedd’s Standing Orders, unlike in the Scottish and other parliaments, although this portfolio has to feature within the remit of a Senedd committee.
- Other structures that exist to support equality mainstreaming in oversight and lawmaking (such as the Women’s Caucus, and Cross-Party Groups) are not mandatory and their existence is dependent on decisions by Members of the Senedd and officials. As a result, scrutiny of

equalities issues relies heavily on committed individuals and informal coalitions.

- Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) accompany all Senedd Bills. However, these are often not available when a Bill is laid and then when they are considered by Members, they can be lacking in depth and breadth.
- Members appreciated the briefings available from the Senedd Commission to support their scrutiny work.
- There is a need for policy-relevant disaggregated equalities data for Wales.

What this means

- There is currently no institutional requirement, and insufficient institutional supports, for Members to consider equality in their scrutiny work or debates.
- The EIA accompanying a Bill does not normally receive the same level of attention from the relevant Committee as the Regulatory Impact Assessment receives from the Finance Committee.
- Members noted that the Welsh Government can take a tick box approach to completing compliance exercises instead of a principled approach in its public sector equalities decision-making.¹¹
- Members believe they would benefit from access to regular and consistent equalities mainstreaming training, including how to use gender budgeting tools such as gender beneficiary assessments, as well as the social model of disability and antiracist approaches.

Our view and recommendations for action

25. The Board's view is that equality should be a core institutional principle reflected in structures, standing orders, committee work and access to evidence. By strengthening leadership, data, expertise and accountability, the Senedd ensures that laws, policies and public spending are scrutinised through an

¹¹ [Welsh Government did not comply with equality law, regulator says | EHRC](#)

intersectional equality lens, contributing to more equal outcomes for the people of Wales.

26. The review found that although Members have access to some high quality in-house expertise, scrutiny can be improved by better access to disaggregated data. Providing regular training for Members, including on tools such as gender budgeting including beneficiary assessments, as well as the social model of disability and antiracist approaches, would enable Members to fully ensure their scrutiny contributes to more equal outcomes.

27. Yet while it is vital that one committee has a dedicated focus on equalities, it is also vital that all committees engage in this cross-cutting issue. As such, we are also of the view that scrutiny of equality issues should be mainstreamed throughout committees, not solely viewed as the responsibility of an equality committee. This would ensure that the impact of government policies, spending, and laws on different groups of people is considered in all subject areas, especially those where equality issues are not immediately obvious – like agriculture, taxation, or economic development. We recognise that individual Committees will wish to determine their own priorities, taking account of emerging areas of interest. However, we believe that all Committees should adopt an equality mainstreaming model that will assist them to promote equalities on an intersectional basis, and enhance engagement by working collaboratively with equalities organisations, the relevant think tanks for the policy area under consideration, and businesses, trade unions and academics, as appropriate, to work on solution-focused inquiries.

28. For instance, we believe the Welsh Government should consider placing a mainstreaming equality specific duty on public services in Wales, similar to the Scottish duty which sets out a principled approach to organisational leadership, culture and operations which can positively improve delivery against the Public Sector Equality Duty. This approach seeks to measure outcomes, rather than processes driving improvements through actions.

29. When it comes to embedding organisational mainstreaming, we consider that the existence of a standalone equality committee should be a requirement of Standing Orders (in line with the requirement in Standing Order 19 for a committee responsible for Finance). Equalities should not be merged with other large areas of policy, as it risks the scrutiny of cross-cutting equalities issues being squeezed.

30. In the same vein, in order to improve the institutional structures underpinning mainstreaming, we are recommending the formalising of the Women's Caucus.

31. Delivering these recommendations, relating to Members of the Senedd will be made easier with the continuity of leadership in promoting equalities matters that the Senedd Commissioners have shown in recent Seneddau. Implementation and promotion of the outcomes the Board wished to see will benefit from a champion. For this reason, we are recommending that the Senedd Commission should continue to determine that one Commissioner has responsibility for equality of opportunity in the future.

32. Similarly, in order to ensure the mainstreaming of equalities considerations underpins all Senedd business, those supporting Members to engage in that business should also benefit from visible leadership. The Board is recommending that a Senior Commission Official is designated to lead the Senedd Commission services' work on equality mainstreaming.

Recommendation 31. Every Committee should routinely include scrutiny of equality evidence in its inquiries. The Chair's Forum and the Senedd Commission services should support this, by providing a toolkit including, for example: an equalities checklist for Terms of Reference, equality mainstreaming guidance, disaggregated data, internal and external equalities expertise, and witness diversity guidance/data. The Chair's Forum should routinely review the effectiveness of the approach.

Recommendation 32. Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a dedicated Equality Committee or with specific remit or functions in relation to oversight of equalities. This does not displace the duty on other committees to take responsibility for mainstreaming equalities scrutiny in their work, as noted above.

Recommendation 33. The Welsh Government should be required to inform the relevant committee when a Bill's equality impact assessment is published.

Recommendation 34. Senedd Committees should request that the Senedd Commission's Research Service provide an equalities mainstreaming review of each Bill that they scrutinise.

Recommendation 35. The Committee with responsibility for equalities should utilise the Senedd Commission's Research Service to undertake, or commission

through the Academic Fellowship Scheme, an Equality Mainstreaming review of the Programme for Government. This desk review would assess the potential for the Programme to ameliorate existing inequalities. The review to then be considered by the committee with responsibility for equalities, who would disseminate advice to the other committees.

Recommendation 36. Each committee should undertake one Equality Mainstreaming Model¹² engagement during a four-year term. The Senedd Commission should ensure that its Services have appropriate capacity to support the committee's engagement with an Equality Mainstreaming Panel (including equality organisations, trades unions, think tanks, sector bodies as relevant to the policy area working with the committee on the evidence-gathering and solution-focused processes).

Recommendation 37. The Senedd Commission should provide regular equalities mainstreaming scrutiny training for Members.

Recommendation 38. The Senedd Commission ensures it has appropriate resources and budget for additional equality-related research as required.

Recommendation 39. That the Welsh Government consider creating a Mainstreaming Equality Duty, as part of its suite of Welsh Specific Equality Duties, The Mainstreaming Duty would require public services in Wales to report every three years on how mainstreaming equality within their organisations has improved leadership, operational functions, policymaking for equality, the equitable delivery of public services, and meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and Welsh Specific Equality Duties.

Recommendation 40. The committee with responsibility for equalities should seek an assessment of the Senedd's legislative competence in relation to equality and human rights, in particular the potential to devolve responsibility for the operation and monitoring of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to the Welsh Government. The review should also consider, whether, in the event of the Equality Act ever being repealed, the Senedd would have competence to legislate to impose duties on public authorities (in comparable fashion to Welsh Ministers' existing powers under the Equality Act 2010).

¹² A proposed gender mainstreaming model was tested for its ability to reveal intersectional inequalities in 2010. The resulting collaborative multi-strand model situates intersectional enquiry at a structural level, enables the integration of equalities and human rights approaches and supports prioritisation without reductively homogenising 'strand' specific inequalities.

Recommendation 41. Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a women’s parliamentary caucus composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda.

Recommendation 42. The Senedd Commission should continue to determine that one Commissioner has responsibility for equality of opportunity in the future.

Recommendation 43. The Senedd Commission to designate a Senior Commission Official to lead the Senedd Commission services’ work on equality mainstreaming [including the requirements under GOWA 2006 sch.2 s8(1) that the Senedd Commission must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people].

Annex 1: Report of the Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review



24th February 2026

Dr Alison Parken, Dr Rachel Minto and Dr Leah Hibbs



Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the contributions and support of the members of the Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review Board (FFIPR):

Chair: Joyce Watson AS/MS, Jane Dodds AS/MS, Peter Fox AS/MS, Sian Gwenllian AS/MS, Mike Hedges AS/MS

Our thanks are also due to current and former Senedd Members who gave their time to participate in surveys, interviews and focus groups.

We also want to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of members of the Senedd Commission who have given us the benefit of their knowledge of the operation of the Senedd, assisted with data collection and organising interviews, and advice: Aled ap Neill, Anna Daniel, Martha Da Gama Howells, Bethan Garwood, Tom Jackson, Bethan Jones, Helen Jones, Samuel Jones, Rhys Morgan and Claire Thomas.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Martha Da Gama Howells who has steered this project for the Senedd Commission with unfailing commitment, collected administrative data, and helped us to navigate the organisational systems and process, as well as offering practical advice and support.

And to acknowledge Hannah Johnson, special external advisor to the project, who has been unfailingly encouraging, and given us the benefit of her extensive knowledge of undertaking Gender Sensitive Audits internationally, including contributing that knowledge to the writing of the report.

We benefited from high-level insights and expertise from the FFIPR Reference Panel of senior academics: Prof. Rachel Ashworth (Cardiff University), Prof. Sarah Childs (University of Edinburgh), Dr Meryl Kenny (University of Edinburgh), Prof. Laura MacAllister (Cardiff University) and Prof. Diana Stirbu (London Metropolitan University).

Our thanks also to Dr Rob Jones, Dr Jac Larner and Hedydd Phylip from Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre for sharing their expertise at various points during the project.

Research team

Dr Alison Parken OBE: Alison is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Cardiff Business School. Her research and policy analysis work on promoting equality in Wales includes leading the development of the unique ‘gender pay differences’ Welsh Specific Equality Duty and creating an equality mainstreaming model to embed equality in public policy development. Email: parkena@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Rachel Minto: Rachel is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the School of Law and Politics at Cardiff University where she is also Acting Director of the Wales Governance Centre. She has a background in European Union politics and governance, with a particular interest in gender equality, and has more recently applied that knowledge in a devolved context. Email: mintor@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Leah Hibbs: Leah is a Lecturer in Social Sciences (Social Policy) at the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. She has a background in researching how political representation is gendered using a feminist institutionalist lens, with a focus on Welsh politics, and writes specifically on factors including violence against women in politics and women’s routes to political leadership. Email: hibbsl@cardiff.ac.uk

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audits.....	5
Research Approach	7
Equality of Representation and Participation	11
Women’s Representation	11
Diverse Representation and the big data gap	17
Board Recommendations: Equal Representation	17
Equal Participation	18
Political Styles.....	22
Committee and Plenary work	25
Evidence diversity monitoring.....	28
Board Recommendations: Equal Participation	29
Organisation and culture	30
Work-life balance	30
Managing Childcare responsibilities	32
Crèche.....	33
Family Leave Policies	37
Caring for Parents or other family members.....	38
Working Remotely and Hybrid Working.....	39
Reasonable Adjustments	42
Late sittings	43
Accommodating absence: Proxy voting and pairing.....	45
Board Recommendations: Work-life balance	47
Proposed changes to the organisation of business for Seventh Senedd	49
Board Recommendation: Senedd Reform proposals.....	51
Abuse of Members: Beyond a ‘Cost of Doing Politics’	51
Standards of Conduct and Incidents Within the Senedd	52
Behaviour Beyond ‘Robust’ Politics.....	53
Responses to Incidents within the Senedd.....	55
Board Recommendations: Abuse and Harassment within the Senedd/ Standards of Conduct Committee	56

Forms and Impacts of Violence from the Public	57
Offline Abuse	57
Impact of Offline Abuse on Members, Staff, and Democracy	58
Online abuse	59
Impact of Online Abuse and Violence on Members, democracy, and staff	61
Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Members from the Public	65
Board Recommendations: Abuse of Members	70
Equality Mainstreaming: The unfulfilled potential of the unique ‘Welsh way’	72
Board Recommendations: Equality Mainstreaming.....	79
Support Services.....	82
Board Recommendation: Support Services	83
Conclusion and recommendations	84
Board Recommendation: Conclusion	84
FFIPR Board Recommendations	86
Glossary	95
Annex 1: Senedd and Senedd Commission policies practices and procedures and the Determination	97
Committee Evidence Diversity Monitoring	97
Induction and Training for Members	98
Dignity and Respect	99
Proxy voting.....	100
The Senedd Commission’s Creche Feasibility Study.....	101
Members’ Pay and Staffing and Business Support - overview	102
Annex 2: International Standards	104
International GSP standards: gender mainstreaming.....	104

List of Figures and Methodology Notes

Figure 1: Men and Women elected at Senedd elections

Figure 2: Percentage of Women elected at Senedd elections

Figure 3: Percentage of Women per Party elected to the Senedd

Figure 4: Number of years that Cabinet portfolios have been held by men and women

Figure 5: Percentage of time that Cabinet portfolios have been held by men and women

Figure 6: Number of years that Committee Chairs have been held by men and women

Figure 7: Percentage of time that Committee Chairs have been held by men and women

Figure 8: Proportion of contributions and length of contributions made by women and men in Plenary

Figure 9: Proportion of interruptions and interventions ‘given’ and ‘received’ by women and men

Figure 10: End times for Plenary meetings in the fifth and sixth Senedd

Introduction

In anticipation of the Welsh devolution settlement, the National Assembly Advisory Group, established by the then Secretary of State for Wales, set out guidance for initial Standing Orders to contribute to the establishment of the National Assembly. First amongst its aims was to establish a legislature that was ‘democratic, effective, efficient and inclusive’ (National Assembly Advisory Group, 1998).

The intention was to ensure that the Assembly effectively represented all the different parts and people of Wales through the operation of the [then] Assembly and its legislative outputs. The founding legislation contains the requirement to ‘*make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all*’ (s.120, Government of Wales Act, 1998).

This was at the time a unique duty, more expansive than the coverage of UK and EU equal treatment legislation, and without derogation (Chaney and Fevre, 2002). In opting to expand the categories of inequality in scope and include a requirement to annually assess: ‘*...how effective those arrangements were in promoting equality of opportunity*’ (s.120, 2b, GOWA, 1998), the devolution settlement was incorporating a duty to *promote* equality in all its duties and functions, heralding a proactive approach to equality mainstreaming.

The Welsh Government approved a new, determinedly proactive definition of mainstreaming to guide its legislative and policy outputs:

‘Mainstreaming’ equality is about the integration of respect for diversity and equality of opportunity principles, strategies and practices into the everyday work of the Assembly and other public bodies. It means that equality issues should be included from the outset as an integral part of the policy-making and service delivery process and the achievement of equality should inform all aspects of the work of every individual within an organisation. The success of mainstreaming should be measured by evaluating whether inequalities have been reduced ([Cabinet Written Statement 12th January 2005, 1 EOC\(2\)03-05\(p2-annex a\)e](#))¹

The leadership intention was clear: equality is not a ‘nice to have’ but central to a Welsh devolution steeped in social justice principles. The Cabinet also recommended that a Task and Finish Group be established to set out a mainstreaming equality strategy for the Welsh Government, which included disability and race action plans. This work was

¹ [Equality of Opportunity Committee EOC\(2\) 09-05\(p5\)e](#)

completed in 2007. However, efforts to mainstream equality in the work of the Senedd were somewhat superseded by the separation of executive powers in the Government of Wales Act 2006 in which equality of opportunity became the remit of Ministers (s.77). Further, subsequent equalities acts, while signifying progress through extending coverage of protected characteristics and introducing duties to advance equality, have not resulted in giving effect to mainstreaming in the work of the Senedd as envisaged (Parken, 2022, Parken 2018).² For example, Schedule 18 of the Equality Act 2010 excludes the Parliaments of the UK, Scotland and Wales from the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Equality duties rest upon the Senedd Commission in relation to operating with due regard to the principle that there should be equal opportunity for all in proceedings and functions but there is a gap in requirements, of say, Senedd Committees, to give due regard to the promotion of equality in scrutiny.^{3 4} However, the principles of mainstreaming – that it is everyone’s responsibility and that it seeks to undermine the structural social, economic and cultural drivers of inequality, can be seen in the Welsh Government’s recent equality plans - [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#), [Disabled People’s Rights Plan 2025 to 2035](#), and the [Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan](#).

The Senedd has a proud history of women’s representation and legislation designed to promote equality. The Assembly was the first in the world to reach absolute parity between men and women, when in 2003 it was comprised of 30 women and 30 men, and ‘from 2000-2005 women were more than half of all Cabinet Ministers’ (McAllister, 2016).⁵ Research has shown that equal representation has effected substantive legislation, as women have championed policy and legislative reform on equalities, children’s rights, childcare, environment and health (Chaney 2009), social cohesion, education, addressing violence against women and girls and world leading legislation on the well-being of future generations, which pioneers an ambitious preventative agenda. The Welsh Government has recently, with cross-party consensus, *supported a Member’s Bill to ensure British Sign Language has full status as a language*.

The interest and commitment to equality is also demonstrated by the number of Cross-Party Groups, which enable politicians to work collegially on equality policy issues with equalities organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and businesses. Current Cross-Party Groups cover issues such as Autism, Older People and Ageing,

² Parken, A. (2022) [Equality and Devolution in Wales: A distinct approach?](#)

Parken A (2018) [Putting Gender Equality at the Heart of Decision-Making](#)

³ Government of Wales Act 2006, Section 35(2)

⁴ Government of Wales Act 2006, Schedule 2: The Senedd Commission, 8(1)

⁵ [Women in the National Assembly](#)

Race and Equality, Disability, Deaf Issues, Women, Mental Health, Faith, and Poverty among others.

The Senedd building and the Siambr were designed to create bright open spaces for deliberative democracy and set a standard for environmental sustainability. The operation of business in the Sixth Senedd includes family friendly measures such as the intention that Plenary finishes by 18.00, and to provide childcare and family caring allowances for instances of late sittings.

In 2022, Members of the Senedd voted to retain the availability of [hybrid working](#) which was introduced during the pandemic, and in 2023 to extend [proxy voting](#) for parental leave to additionally cover long-term illness or injury, caring and bereavement.

The devolution settlement and the Senedd as an institution have changed considerably in the past 26 years. This research is an assessment of how family-friendly and inclusive it is as an institution, and how well it operates to reduce inequalities through law-making against *international parliamentary standards*.

The research fulfils a recommendation of the Reform Bill Committee's [Stage 1 Report of the Senedd Cymru \(Electoral Candidate Lists\) Bill](#), to undertake an assessment of the Senedd against international standards for gender sensitive parliaments. In keeping with efforts to mainstream equality in Wales, including the development of the first model to promote equality in policy development on an intersectional basis [Equality Mainstreaming Model \(Parken, 2010\)](#) this research has considered equalities in an inclusive manner. Hence the Board decided to change the name of the Review from Gender Sensitive Audit (GSA) to Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review (FFIPR). The FFIPR Board chaired by Joyce Watson MS, commissioned research to consider the extent to which the Senedd:

- values and prioritises gender equality as a social, economic and political objective;
- actively supports inclusive representation and participation, recognising how gender intersects with other characteristics to shape access, participation and power, and
- reorients and transforms its institutional culture, processes and practices and outputs towards these objectives; and
- identify where further progress is needed to improve gender sensitivity and inclusion across all aspects of parliamentary work, particularly in parliamentary decision making, providing timely and actionable recommendations to the Seventh Senedd Commission and Business Committee.

However, the ambition to quantitatively report on the representativeness of Senedd Members across all the grounds of inequality has been limited, and intersectional analysis somewhat forestalled, as demographic data on Members is not collected. Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 sought to remedy this data deficit by requiring political parties to collect demographic information on candidates, but it has not been commenced.⁶ Nevertheless, the under-representation of elected members, proportionate to their presence in the population from ethnic minority communities, lower socio-economic groups, disabled people and younger people, was commented on by our research participants in qualitative interviews.

The aim of the FFIPR research, was to assess the family friendliness and inclusiveness of the Senedd 26 years on, including the organisation of business, under the auspices of the Llywydd, the Business Committee, and the Senedd Commission. The research took place at a time of significant change with a new electoral system in place for elections in May 2026, and the expansion of members from 60 to 96. In this context we have considered equal representation, equal participation and the culture of the Sixth Senedd, as well as garnering input from Members of previous Seneddau, to assess its ‘liveability’ in terms of managing work and life, and how well women’s voices are heard and their concerns transposed to promoting equality in law-making and scrutiny.

This report sets out what is meant by ‘gender sensitising parliaments’, our approach to the research, findings, and suggested recommendations for the Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Board (FFIPR). The current policy context for Members Pay and Allowances is provided by Commission Services in Annex 1. We set out suggested recommendations, which were in keeping with the vision and ambition for Welsh devolution to be fully representative and participative, with a culture that promotes equality and thus creates an effective inclusive democracy. These have since been deliberated by the FFIPR to reach the Board approved recommendations included in each section and collated at the end of the report.

⁶ The Equality Act 2010 is UK legislation, and consequently the Welsh Government does not have power to commence Section 106. The Llywydd, on behalf of the Senedd, has previously written to the then Secretary of State for Wales to call for the commencement of this Section. The current UK Government has stated that it is “exploring when to commence the section 106 provisions.” Minister of State (Minister for Women and Equalities), Minister of State (Development), 28 January 2025, <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2025-01-23.26206.h&s=section+106+speaker%3A25618#g26206.r0>

Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audits

The concept of ‘gender-sensitive parliaments’ has become an international democratic standard, developed over the last 25 years. A gender-sensitive parliament is described as one that: *‘values and prioritizes gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices and outputs towards these objectives’*.⁷

In 2017 the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)⁸ stated that gender-sensitive parliaments:

1. Promote and achieve equality in numbers of women and men across all bodies and internal structures.
2. Develop a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. Mainstream gender equality throughout all work.
4. Foster an internal culture that respects women’s rights, promote gender equality and respond to the needs and realities of MPs – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. Acknowledge and build on the contribution made by men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. Encourage political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
7. Equip parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourage the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

A gender-sensitive parliament audit or self-assessment is a formal stocktake of a parliament’s progress towards becoming a gender-sensitive parliament, by examining its rules, practices, culture, and outputs. There is no single way to conduct an audit - the scope and approach can be tailored to each parliament.

In 2020 the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) recommended⁹ that all parliaments conduct an audit as soon as possible to establish a benchmark against which future developments can be evaluated. The 2022 IPU Kigali Declaration similarly

⁷ Childs, S. and Palmieri, S. (2023) Gender Sensitive Parliaments: Feminizing Formal Political Institutions. In M. Sawyer, L.A. Banaszak, J. True and J. Kantola (eds) [Handbook of Feminist Governance](#). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

⁸ IPU (2017) [Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments](#)

⁹ CPA (2020) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards And A Checklist For Parliamentary Change](#)

urged parliaments to undertake two gender audits to measure progress over the next ten years.¹⁰

Many tools have been developed to measure the ‘gender-sensitivity’ of a parliament against international standards. This includes the IPU’s self-assessment toolkit,¹¹ the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s (CPA) guidelines¹² and standards,¹³ the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) guide,¹⁴ and the European Institute for Gender Equality’s (EIGE) tool.¹⁵

These international organisations have also produced a significant amount of research about gender-sensitive parliamentary practices around the world.¹⁶

We can also learn from the findings, recommendations, and outcomes of other such exercises in the UK, including: The Good Parliament report (2016)¹⁷ - the blueprint for a more representative and inclusive House of Commons, the UK Parliament’s Gender-Sensitive Parliament audit report (2018),¹⁸ the Irish Houses of the Oireachtas’s Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament report (2021),¹⁹ and the Scottish Parliament’s gender-sensitive parliament audit report (2023)²⁰ and practical guide (2025).²¹

Several legislatures have conducted self-assessments and audits, including in Belgium, Moldova, Jersey, Australian Capital Territory, Catalonia, North Macedonia, and Kyrgyzstan, among others that are currently in progress or have not published reports.

These international standards, tools, practices, and learning provide a rich base of targets and practices for the Senedd’s review. But as noted by the distinguished gender-sensitive parliament scholar Sonia Palmieri, the challenge is translating these international norms into local practice through a process of ‘contextualisation and contestation’. This involves recognising political realities and the importance of critical

¹⁰ IPU (2022) [Kigali Declaration - Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world](#)

¹¹ IPU (2016) [Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit](#)

¹² CPA (2022) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments: A Seven-Step Field Guide](#)

¹³ CPA (2020) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards And A Checklist For Parliamentary Change](#)

¹⁴ OSCE (2022) [Participatory Gender Audits Of Parliaments: A Step-By-Step Guidance Document](#)

¹⁵ EIGE, [Gender-sensitive Parliaments self-assessment toolkit](#)

¹⁶ IPU (2011) [Gender-sensitive parliaments: a global review of good practice](#), OSCE (2021) [Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region](#), INTER PARES (2024) [Beyond numbers: stories of gender equality in and through parliament](#), INTER PARES (2022) [Gender-sensitive scrutiny: a guide to more effective law-making and oversight](#)

¹⁷ Childs, S. (2016) [The Good Parliament](#)

¹⁸ UK Parliament (2018) [UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit](#)

¹⁹ Houses of the Oireachtas (2021) [Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament report](#)

²⁰ Scottish Parliament (2023) [A Parliament for All: Report of the Parliament’s Gender Sensitive Audit](#)

²¹ Scottish Parliament (2025) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments: A Practical Guide](#)

actors who drive actual change inside parliament (MPs and parliamentary staff) and outside parliament (academics and society).²²

Research Approach

The guidelines for gender sensitive audits draw on an approach to gender mainstreaming that seeks to understand organisational culture, the ‘ways of seeing and doing’ in organisations (Rees, 1998),²³ The way an organisation works, the taken for granted systems and processes, the way people dress, the working hours, how the building sets a tone or expectation for the ways in which business is done, the organisational hierarchy and its transparency, and the ways in which people interact, all create a culture or cultures. When people are at work, they are not just ‘... *producing goods and services, pay packet and career, they are also building culture*’ (Cockburn, 1988:37).²⁴ Together these symbols, interactions and policies, determine the equity or inequity of day-to-day business. The balance between, which is the more dominant in determining culture, is always in flux. A mainstreaming review seeks to surface any ‘taken for grantedness’ and question what might be creating inequalities.

Our research approach also incorporates Feminist Institutionalism (FI). At the heart of FI is the recognition that the organisation of political life is not neutral but instead advantages particular groups over others (see e.g. Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010).²⁵ Indeed, even when a policy appears ‘neutral’, it may have different effects on *inter alia* for example on women and men, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, or disabled people. Crucially, when investigating the organisation of, in this case, the Senedd, we must explore both formal and informal institutions (Waylen 2014).²⁶ Formal are easiest to identify, i.e. the laws, policies and written rules that have been created to structure and organise the functioning of the Senedd. Beyond these, are informal institutions, i.e. the norms, customs and culture that shape behaviour and ‘ways of doing’ in practice, and at times in contravention to the formal rules in place.

The relationship between the formal rules and informal culture is unique to each organisation (Lowndes 2014: 687),²⁷ requiring an empirical investigation of the

²² Palmieri, S. (2025) [Gender Sensitive Parliaments in Fiji Between International Norms and Localised Change](#)

²³ Rees, T. (1998) *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union*, London: Routledge

²⁴ Cockburn, C (1988) *Machinery of Dominance*, London Pluto Press

²⁵ Mackay, F., M. Kenny, and L. Chappell. (2010) “New Institutionalism Through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism?” *International Political Science Review* 31 (5): 573–588. doi:10.1177/0192512110388788.

²⁶ Waylen, G. (2014) “Informal Institutions, Institutional Change, and Gender Equality.” *Political Research Quarterly* 67 (1): 212–223. doi:10.1177/1065912913510360.

²⁷ Lowndes, V. 2014. “How Are Things Done Around Here? Uncovering Institutional Rules and Their Gendered Effects.” *Politics & Gender* 10 (4): 685–691. doi:10.1017/S1743923X1400049X.

experiences of those working within that organisation. When these experiences have been uncovered, it is possible to identify what is working well and what might need attention to ensure that, in this case, the Senedd is inclusive and supports the full participation of all Members. To this end, an institutional analysis may point to the need to reset, amend or reform formal rules, or to push for cultural change in some areas.

Notably, in committing to this Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review, the Senedd has taken a crucial step towards further strengthening its inclusive and democratic credentials, with the necessary supports in place to realise this. In doing so, it joins fellow parliaments across the world in insisting that a legislature is at the heart of a democracy as a genuine representative of the people.

The research was tendered in July 2025, and commissioned in August 2025 following a review of proposals to the Senedd's Academic Fellowship scheme. The research team obtained ethical approval through Cardiff University's ethics application process in September. The reporting deadline was end of December 2025.

International guidelines for GSAs propose an assessment of equality of representation, participation and whether the culture is equitable and enabling for elected members, parliamentary staff, political parties, the candidate's journey and selection, and public engagement activities. However, these guidelines set out an ideal situation where research and analysis take place over 12 months, and doesn't take place in the year running up to an election (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 2022, p.13)²⁸. Given the available timescale, this research focused solely on the reflections of Members of the Senedd.

The Women's Equality Network Wales (WEN Wales), recently completed research on barriers experienced by women candidates seeking selection and election. The research shows that women are unevenly represented across political parties in the Senedd, and their representation across political parties in local government ranges from 29% to 44%.²⁹ The WEN Wales report finds that caring and financial inequalities, and abuse and harassment continue to be significant barriers to obtaining selection. Further that some women face intersectional inequalities resulting in protected characteristic specific abuse and barriers, interacting with misogyny.

There was a November 2025 deadline for political parties in Wales to publish a plan, in response to Welsh Government's voluntary guidance on improving diversity and inclusion among candidates for the Senedd election in May 2026. WEN Wales asked parties for their published guidance but at the November deadline, none had been published. Some parties published plans in early 2026.

²⁸ [CPA \(2022\) Gender Senistising Parliaments Field-guide](#)

²⁹ Women's Equality Network Wales [Women's experience of the political journey in Wales](#), Cardiff: WEN

Additionally, this FFIPR research, took place during a period when considerable organisational process change was being discussed in preparation for the Seventh Senedd, including implementation of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024, consideration of Committees Effectiveness by the Chair's Forum, the recommendations of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform, the Future Senedd Committee, and the Bay 2032 project.³⁰ Further, the research took place after the Independent Review Board had published its final decisions on the Determination for the Seventh Senedd in July 2025. The Determination covers Members pay and allowances.

Following the template for gender sensitive audits, the research team proposed a mixed methods approach and developed a research design and research instruments appropriate to the Senedd. The research included reviewing Senedd policy documentation, collating existing data on equal representation, commissioning of data from Senedd Research on the diversity of witnesses engaging with Senedd Committees, and data on men and women's contributions in the Plenary and debates, and how often they intervene or interrupt.³¹

The empirical research obtained both quantitative and qualitative data. Twenty-one qualitative interviews were held with current members between 1st October and 14th November 2025. Additionally, two survey instruments were issued with closed and open questions to current and former members (eleven current Member and eight former Member surveys were completed). Current Members were asked to reflect on how well current policies fostered a family-friendly and inclusive Senedd (equal representation, participation, culture, and promoting equality in legislative outputs), while former Members were similarly asked to reflect on policies and culture in their time in the Senedd, as well as reasons for not continuing as an elected Member.

In addition, a number of focused discussions were held with some political party groups, Members of the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and the Women's Cross Party Group.

This research coverage is more exhaustive than similar audits and provides a robust evidence base for the findings and suggested recommendations.

Interviews took place mainly on-line. Carrying out research interviews on Teams assisted with fitting research interviews into Members' busy and often rigid schedules (flexibility is restricted by the scheduling of Plenary, debates, Committee timings, party group meetings and constituency work), enabled the researchers to undertake several

³⁰ A project to secure the long-term office accommodation needs of the Senedd, Senedd Commission and Welsh Government in the Bay, and support the conduct of Senedd business in the Senedd building. The driver for the work is the current Ty Hywel lease ending in 2032.

³¹ Senedd Research is the Senedd's inhouse research and information service.
<https://research.senedd.wales/about-senedd-research/>

interviews back-to-back (as no travel was involved). Online interviewing also ensured a good geographical spread of interviewees and provided time-saving transcripts from the recorded interviews. AI-recorded transcripts were subsequently reviewed and corrected.

The interviews covered Members' caring responsibilities, their views on how well they were managing their work and life balance, including how hybrid working had impacted on this, their views on proposed job-share arrangements, proxy voting, a contemporaneous but separate feasibility study on the creche, their participation in plenaries and committees, differing political styles, their experiences of discrimination abuse or harassment from within and outside the Senedd, how easy it was to be heard when raising issues related to addressing inequalities, and whether there were sufficient mechanisms to institutionalise gender and equality mainstreaming.

To ensure anonymity, participants are referred to simply as a 'male or female Members'. Beyond seeking their consent to take part in the research, Members were subsequently asked to approve direct quotes from their contributions. In the spirit of inquiry, who said what is less important than the content and meaning of what has been shared, and we hope readers will resist attempts at 'jigsaw identification'.

We benefitted throughout from the assistance of Senedd Commission staff who know and understand the current policies, how they have evolved, and are evolving in anticipation of the larger cohort of Members in 2026. Annex 1 provides an overview of policies compiled by Commission Services.

We have also benefitted from the insights of our academic reference panel, several of whom have undertaken or are undertaking such audits in other parliamentary jurisdictions. We would like to thank them for sharing their wisdom.

Equality of Representation and Participation

Women’s Representation

We were able to celebrate women’s representation from the beginning of the National Assembly and particularly in 2003 when we had equal numbers in the NAW [...] I think we attempted from the beginning to create a new kind of political administration that was more family friendly and would encourage more women to become politicians (female former member)

There have been frequent examples where having high-profile women in Cabinet and in the Assembly was really important (male former member)

Wales as a global leader in women’s representation

The Senedd is celebrated as an international success story for women’s representation. Indeed, up to now, the low point of women’s representation was in the first Senedd (1999-2003) when women constituted 40% of elected Members. In the following term, the Senedd became the first legislature in the world to see an equal representation of women and men.³² Whilst women’s representation has fallen from this high point, Wales’s reputation has held as levels have never dropped below 40% (see figure 1 in numbers, figure 2 in percentages, below).

	Men	Women	% of Women
1999	36	24	40
2003	30	30	50
2007	32	28	47
2011	35	25	42
2016	35	25	42
2021	34	26	43

Figure 1: Men and Women elected at Senedd elections

³² Senedd Cymru, [Women, Wales and Politics](#)

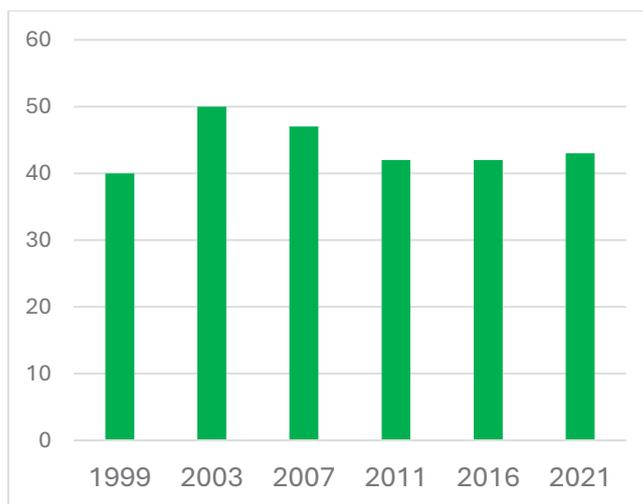


Figure 2: Percentage of Women elected at Senedd elections

Beyond the principle of democratic representation, having a balance of women and men in the legislature has manifold benefits, not least more effective decision-making that draws on a wider range of expertise and experience. In research focusing on the National Assembly, women were found to have given greater consideration to equality within decision-making and also to engage more in collaborative and cross-party working (Chaney 2009).³³

This perception was shared by MSs:

I believe the critical mass of women changed the nature of the issues that were discussed and focused on in general (female former Member)

It was good to have the support of like-minded women in the Assembly to help push through initiatives to encourage more equality measures. [...] Having a 'critical mass' of women from the start of Devolution clearly set the scene for the future. I think the success of the legislation to abolish smacking is a good example as that started with women but then a few men joined us (female former Member)

Wales's position as a global leader in women's representation may be attributed in large part to the positive measures adopted in the 1999 and 2003 Assembly elections by the Labour Party and also Plaid Cymru (Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform 2017).³⁴ Labour performed strongly in both elections, winning 27 of the 60 seats in 1999 and 30

³³ Chaney, P. (2009). *Equal Opportunities and Human Rights: The First Decade of Devolution*, Manchester, Equality and Human Rights Commission

³⁴ [A Parliament that Works for Wales – The Report of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform](#) (2017) pp.119-120

of the 60 seats in 2003, with Plaid Cymru polling second. This drove up the percentage of women parliamentarians (see figure 3), which was sustained in subsequent elections in part through incumbency influence. This raises important questions about the maintenance of more balanced representation irrespective of the party-political composition of the Senedd, to which we return below.

	Labour (% Women)	Conservative (% Women)	Plaid Cymru (% Women)	Lib Dem (% Women)	UKIP (% Women)
1999	54	0	35	50	0
2003	63	18	50	50	0
2007	62	8	47	50	0
2011	47	29	45	40	0
2016	52	27	33	100	29
2021	57	19	38	100	0

Figure 3: Percentage of Women per Party elected to the Senedd

At the top: Women and men in leadership roles

In turn, women have been largely well represented in senior Senedd roles.

A woman has held the role of Llywydd/Presiding Officer for 56% of the first six legislative terms (compared to 44% for a man) whilst a woman has held the role of Deputy Presiding Officer for 38% of the six terms (compared to 62% for a man). Since the third Assembly, there has always been at least one woman in the role of either Presiding Officer or Deputy Presiding Officer at any one time.

Within the Cabinet, the picture has been mixed. Most notably, it was not until 2025 that Wales saw its first female First Minister (the sixth First Minister since the establishment of the Assembly in 1999). However, in 2024, Wales again took a world leading position with the swearing in of its first Black First Minister who was also the first Black leader of a European nation.

Looking across the life of the Senedd (see figures 4 and 5), beyond the office of First Minister, women have been notably under-represented in the roles of Deputy First Minister and Counsel General (although neither role has not existed throughout the life of the Senedd³⁵). However, in seven of the remaining nine portfolios, women have held

³⁵ The role of the Counsel General has been in statute since the Government of Wales Act 2006. It may be noted that because the role of the Counsel General is to provide legal advice and to be a representative in the courts of the Welsh Government, there have historically been a limited number of Members with the qualifications to undertake this role at any one time.

these positions for the majority of the Senedd’s life. Notably, six of these portfolios have been held by a woman for at least 60% of the time: Business Manager/Chief Whip (92%), Agriculture/Rural Affairs (60%), Education (65%), Environment/Sustainability (64%), Finance (81%) and Local Government (69%).

	Years Male	Years Female	Years Vacant/Non-existent	% Male	% Female
First Minister	24	2	0	92	8
Deputy First Minister	10	0	16	100	0
Counsel General	15	2	9	88	12
Business Manager / Trefnydd / Chief Whip	2	24	0	8	92
Agriculture / Rural Affairs	10	15	1	40	60
Culture / Heritage	15	8	3	65	35
Economy	20	6	0	77	23
Education	9	17	0	35	65
Environment / Sustainability	9	16	1	36	64
Finance	5	21	0	19	81
Health	11	15	0	42	58
Local Government	8	18	0	31	69

Figure 4: Number of years that Cabinet portfolios have been held by men and women

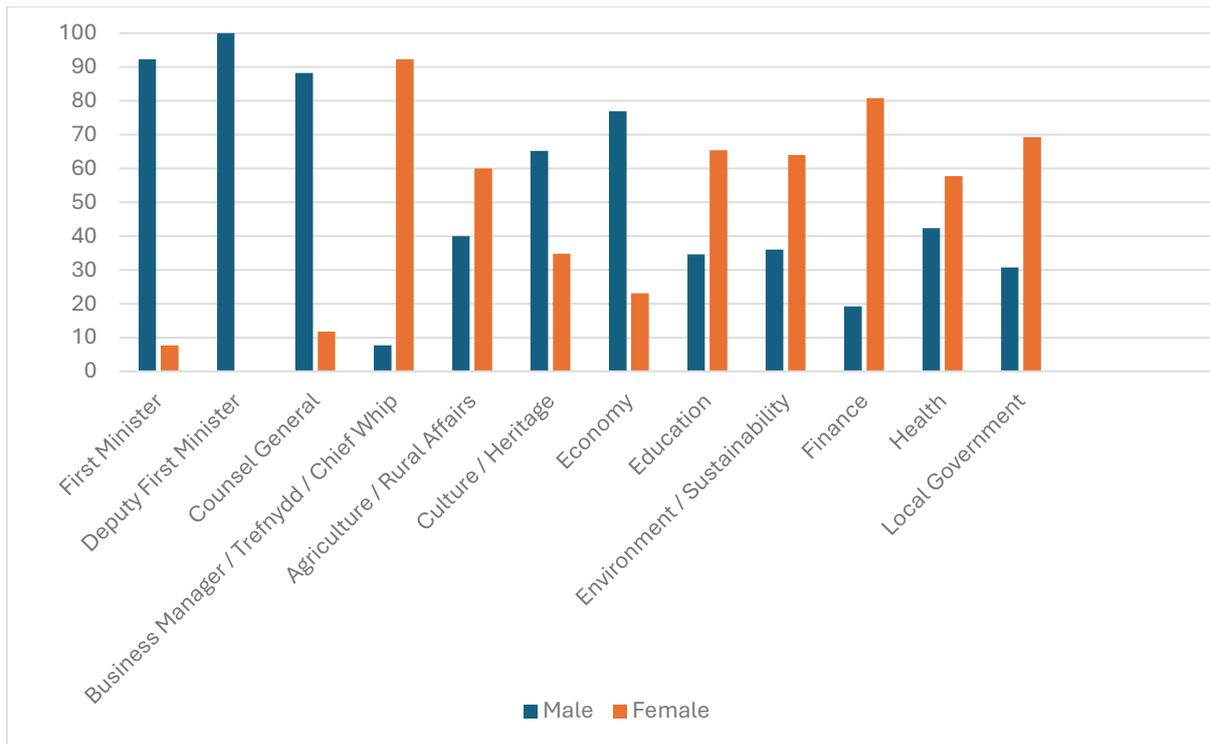


Figure 5: Percentage of time that Cabinet portfolios have been held by men and women

Previous research has suggested that allocation of portfolios amongst ministers is often gendered, with women tending to ‘fit’ into policy areas which align closely with gendered stereotypes (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 2011; Goddard 2019).³⁶ Senior female politicians are often allocated (or, indeed, choose) what have been termed ‘pink’ or ‘soft’ portfolios centred around caring and expressive roles like the environment, education, or those concerned with gender or equalities (Curtin 2022).³⁷ Portfolios are also enmeshed with considerations of prestige and those coded as ‘masculine’ by previous work are often those seen as higher prestige and include areas like economy and finance, and are usually more commonly associated with higher budgets and likelihood of progression to top senior roles (Krook and O’Brien 2012).³⁸

Evidence for this here is mixed, with some deviations from previous research. For example, whilst Economy here, commonly coded as a high prestige masculine portfolio, has been dominated by male ministers (77%), Finance (also usually listed as high

³⁶ Duerst-Lahti, G. and Kelly, R. M. (2011). *Gender Power, Leadership, and Governance*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Goddard, D. (2019). Entering the men’s domain? Gender and portfolio allocation in European governments. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58(2), 631-655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12305>

³⁷ Curtin, J. et al. (2022). Sex, gender, and promotion in executive office: Cabinet careers in the world of Westminster. *Governance* n/a(n/a), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12667>

³⁸ Krook, M. L. and O’Brien, D. Z. (2012). All the President’s Men? The Appointment of Female Cabinet Ministers Worldwide. *The Journal of Politics* 74(3), pp. 840-855.

prestige masculine) has been more often held by women (81%). Others were also seemingly deviating slightly from the usual expectation. For instance, Agriculture and Rural Affairs is usually considered masculine-coded but here was 60% women; and Health and Culture and Heritage, both normally feminine-coded portfolios, had seen male ministers 42% and 65% of the time respectively. Despite this, there remains some evidence of gendered portfolio allocations for ministers in Education and Environment/Sustainability (feminine-coded), and Counsel General (high-prestige, masculine).

Sustaining representation: Preventing backsliding beyond 2026

Upon the recommendation of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill was introduced in September 2023 with a view to integrating statutory gender quotas into Senedd elections.³⁹ The bill was ultimately withdrawn following the assessment that it was outside of legislative competence, with Welsh Government issuing non-statutory guidance on measures parties could take to increase the diversity of candidates in its stead.^{40 41}

The decision to drop the bill caused much concern amongst those MSs and civil society actors who viewed gender quotas as a necessary step to ensuring a representative legislature.⁴²

[on ‘Gender Quotas Bill’] ... we had all of the evidence, you know it was all there but it will be a test of the future Senedd if anyone puts this in their manifesto (female MS).

Indeed, without specific support measures, the Senedd’s more gender balanced composition is highly precarious, with the risk that the Seventh Senedd may be the least representative of women to date.⁴³

³⁹ Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill.

<https://business.senedd.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=42338>

⁴⁰ Presiding Officer’s Statement on Legislative Competence, 11 March 2024.

<https://senedd.wales/media/jmeascd1/pri-ld16394-pos-e.pdf>

⁴¹ Welsh Government, Diversity and inclusion guidance for registered political parties, 25 March 2025,

<https://www.gov.wales/diversity-and-inclusion-guidance-registered-political-parties-html#168276>

⁴² A Missed Opportunity for Gender Equality: The Case for Gender Quotas, WEN Wales, 18 September 2024, <https://wenwales.org.uk/en/a-missed-opportunity-for-gender-equality-the-case-for-gender-quotas/>

⁴³ Why the next Senedd could be the least representative of women ever, Electoral Reform Society, 8th April 2025, <https://electoral-reform.org.uk/why-the-next-senedd-could-be-the-least-representative-of-women-ever/>

Hope was expressed that competence for a measure to support candidate diversity would be considered in the future. However, some parties have pursued voluntary positive action measures variously for women, ethnic minorities and disabled people. Ultimately, it will not be until the outcome of the May 2026 Senedd elections that there will be certainty of the representativeness of the make-up of Wales's legislature.

Conclusion

There has certainly been much to celebrate in Wales with respect to the representation of women in the legislature. From a 'low point' of 40% in 1999, Wales went on to be a world leader in women's representation, as the first legislature with a balanced representation of women and men. In order for the Senedd to be truly representative of the people of Wales, it is crucial that women's representation does not slide backwards but, instead, it must be bolstered as part of broader work to strengthen the representative qualities of Wales's elected body.

Diverse Representation and the big data gap

A common criticism levelled against the Senedd is its notably poor performance beyond women's representation. Although Wales is recognised as the home of Europe's first Black First Minister, there have been very few Members from ethnic minority backgrounds. Whilst it is certainly the case that the Senedd has been markedly *undiverse* beyond its representation of women, an in-depth analysis is precluded by the lack of any formalised data on the personal characteristics of Senedd Members.

As Members of the Senedd are not employees of the Senedd Commission, their demographic data (including on the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 and their socio-economic status) is not collected. As part of this report, there was an attempt to compile a database from public declarations from MSs regarding disability and sexuality; however, the collected data was partial such that it was insufficient for analysis. But we can infer from public declarations that the Senedd has, at any one time, not had more than 5% of elected Members declare LGBTQ, disabled or ethnic minority status, respectively.

This gap in data poses serious problems, not least in preventing more in-depth understanding on representation in the Senedd.

Board Recommendations: Equal Representation

- **Recommendation:** The Senedd and Business Committee should ensure that any statutory review into the impact of the new electoral system as a result of Section 19 of [The Senedd Cymru \(Members and Elections\) Act 2024](#) includes an assessment of its impact on diversity and inclusion. It should also consider any imbalances that have occurred and make recommendations for how these can be addressed
- **Recommendation:** The Welsh Government should seek an Order in Council, under s. 109 of the [Government of Wales Act 2006](#), calling for the devolution of competence in relation to legislation on measures to support diversity of electoral candidates, and laying the proposed Order under Standing Order 25. The Welsh Government should also consider any other legal routes that can be pursued in order to fulfil the Senedd’s majority support in favour of statutory mechanisms to achieve gender-balance amongst electoral candidates.
- **Recommendation:** Senedd Commission services should collect demographic data across all protected characteristics of Members of the Senedd on entering the Senedd to facilitate equalities analysis of representation. This should include indicators of socio-economic status (such as parents’ occupations, housing status, school attended) and intersectional analysis.
- **Recommendation:** A further Family-Friendly Inclusive Parliament Review is conducted during the Seventh Senedd, in a timeframe that provides for its scope to encompass political parties, Member’s staff, Senedd Commission services staff, and public engagement.

Equal Participation

Parliamentary business is conducted in the twice-weekly Plenary meetings and the Senedd’s 17 committees.⁴⁴ Exploring MSs’ participation in these forums reveals the ways in which Senedd Members are able to make substantive contributions to the life of the Senedd.

Committees

Currently, seven of the 17 committees are policy and legislation committees, each of which has six Committee Members. These committees are organised thematically as

⁴⁴ <https://senedd.wales/senedd-business/committees/>

opposed to aligning with ministerial portfolios (Stirbu 2021: 44).⁴⁵ Beyond these thematic committees are also a number of functional committees, some of which may be considered more strategically significant for Senedd business. These include the Finance Committee, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and the Business Committee. With four Committee Members each, these committees have a smaller membership than their thematic counterparts.

As part of each committee, the chair plays an important leadership role. In addition to ensuring the fair and balanced inclusion of Members in the committee’s discussions and debates, committee chairs can shape a committee’s work, including its agenda and recommendations issuing from inquiries. As such, these are high-status and coveted positions. The Business Committee is responsible for deciding upon the allocation of Committee Chairs to party groups, doing so with respect to the political make-up of the Senedd and in consultation with the party groups themselves. It is then left to the parties to nominate individuals to these roles in a Plenary meeting; and in a case of there being two or more nominations, a secret ballot is held with all Senedd Members.

Figures 6 and 7 below reveal some striking findings about the chairing of some key Senedd committees. It is only on the Business Committee (which is always chaired by the Presiding Officer) and the committee responsible for Local Government matters that there has been a more equitable distribution of these roles between women and men.

Across the remainder of Committee Chairs analysed, there is a notable imbalance, most concerningly with respect to the chairing of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee (which has been held by a male MS for 85% of the Senedd’s lifetime) and the chairing of the Finance Committee (which has been held by a male MS for 68% of the committee’s lifetime).

The findings from these two committees are particularly striking given their strategic importance to the work of the Senedd. Indeed, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee scrutinises every Bill laid before the Senedd, and may also consider any matter relating to legislation, devolution, the constitution, justice and external affairs. It is notable that in the current Senedd, there are no women Members of this Committee.

	Years Male	Years Female	Years not convened
Legislation, Justice and Constitution	22	4	0
Business	13	13	0
Agriculture / Rural Affairs	26	0	0

⁴⁵ Power, Influence and Impact of Senedd Committees Developing a framework for measuring committees’ effectiveness, May 2021, <https://senedd.wales/media/xtqk0Ojr/gen-ld14672-e.pdf>

Culture / Heritage	4	18	4
Economy	18	8	0
Education	8	18	0
Environment / Sustainability	25	1	0
Finance	15	7	4
Health	22	4	0
Local Government	14	12	0

Figure 6: Number of years that Committee Chairs have been held by men and women⁴⁶

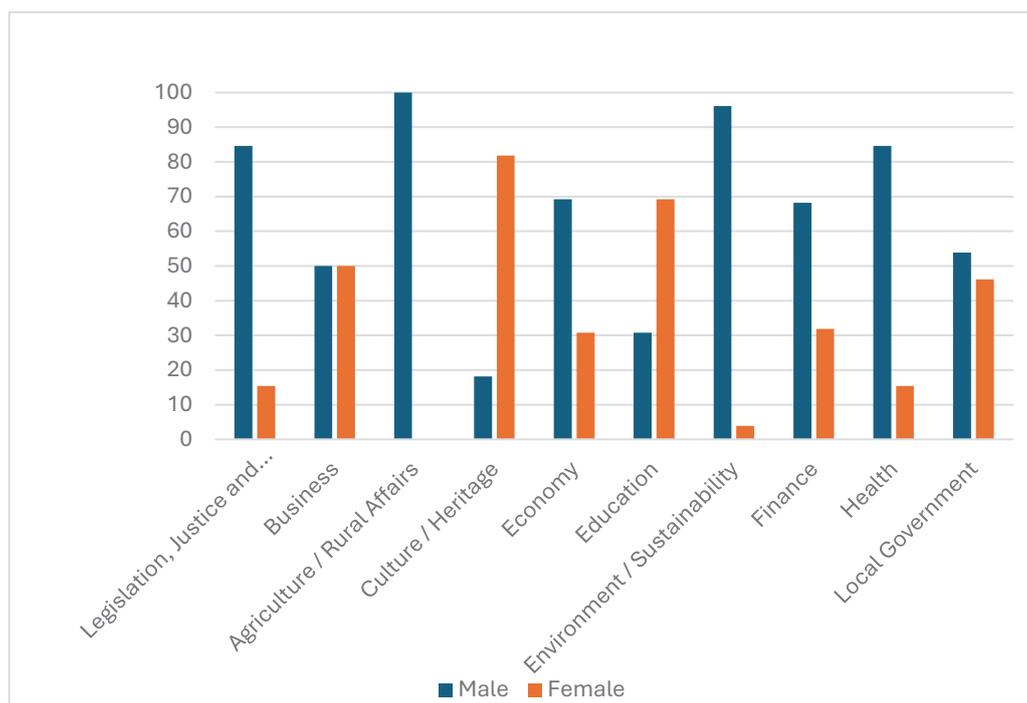


Figure 7: Percentage of time that Committee Chairs have been held by men and women.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Figure 6 Methodological note: * The Finance Committee did not exist during the first Assembly.

**Senedd Committees have not uniformly followed the remits of the Cabinet roles during each Assembly/ Senedd. For example, in some years the scrutiny of the agriculture portfolio has been undertaken by the environment committee, and in others it was done by a standalone committee. The figure shows whether a man or woman was chairing the committee that had the relevant scrutiny responsibility. As such, in each of the second, third, fourth and fifth Seneddau one Committee Chair is double counted. In each case, the Committee Chair was a Male MS, i.e. they are effectively counted as chairing two committees. This over-inflates the number of men in these roles.

⁴⁷ Please refer to the methodological note above (regarding figure 6).

Please see the section on ‘Committee and Plenary work’ below for a discussion about the impact of men and women’s representation on their participation in committee work.

Plenary meetings

Analysis of the Record of Proceedings (ROP) provides additional insight into the equality of participation of women and men in Plenary sessions, with reference to the number of contributions made by an MS, the overall length of contributions, the number of interventions during contributions, and the number of interruptions during contributions.⁴⁸

Looking across the 70 Plenary sessions in the Senedd’s 2024-25 parliamentary year, women made a disproportionately high number of contributions. Likewise, the overall duration of contributions from women was disproportionately longer (see figure 8).⁴⁹

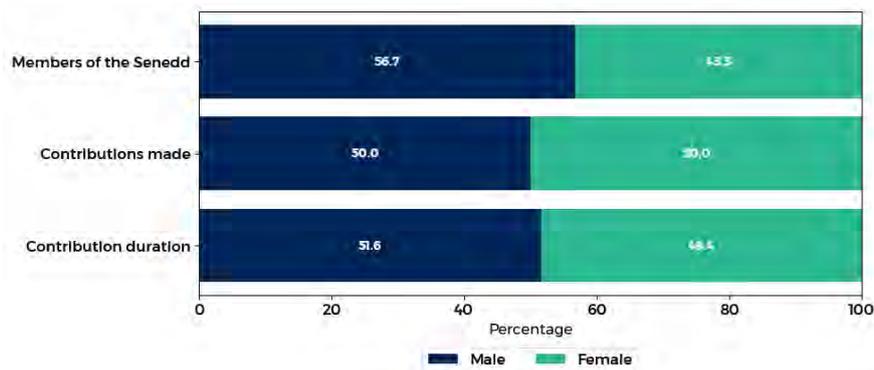


Figure 8: Proportion of contributions and length of contributions made by women and men in Plenary

Analysis revealed that the level of interruptions of women and men was in line with their representation in the Chamber; however, men both ‘gave’ and ‘received’ a disproportionate share of interventions (see figure 9). This meant that men MSs were both more likely than women MSs to request (‘to give’) an intervention when another MS was speaking and were more likely to have a request for an intervention directed towards them when they were speaking (‘to receive’).

⁴⁸ With thanks to Senedd Research for this data collection and analysis.

⁴⁹ Figure 8 Methodological note based on authors’ analysis: Proportion of contributions: statistically significant ($\chi^2=253$, $p<0.01$). Duration of contributions: appears to be statistically significant at around $p<0.05$ ($\chi^2=3.67$).

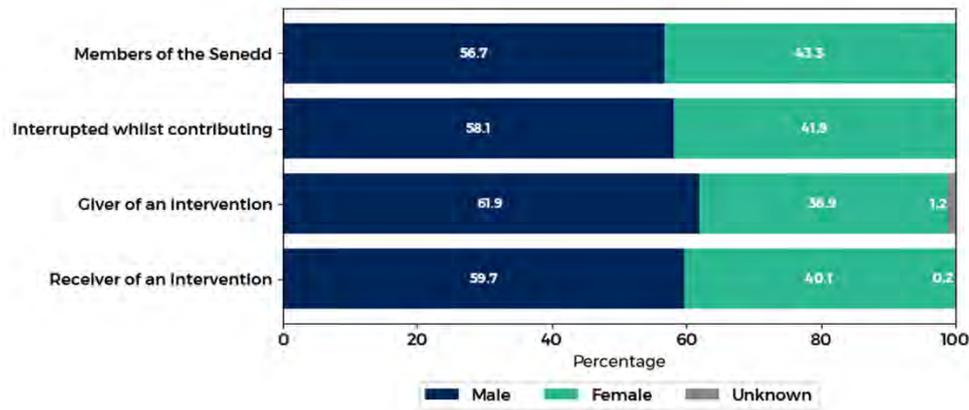


Figure 9: Proportion of interruptions and interventions ‘given’ and ‘received’ by women and men⁵⁰

There were limitations to this analysis given the data available. Firstly, it was not possible to determine whether an intervention had been accepted or not, which is crucial to our understanding of whether women and men are afforded the opportunity to participate. Secondly, it was not possible to identify the sex of the person interrupting (as opposed to intervening). This data would expose whether women and men interrupt more often, also with respect to the sex of the MS they interrupt and whether they are speaking in Welsh or English. Finally, there was no data on whether an MS was participating virtually or in person, which precluded an analysis of the impact of hybrid working to participating in Plenary.

Political Styles

Within the context of the research and the question of who sets the culture, we asked participants about the political styles at play in Senedd Plenary meetings and debates. Interviewees differed in respect of their assessment of culture setting, with some believing that it was mainly set by the Commission and Llywydd, while others thought that the Members constituted the Senedd, ‘*We are the Senedd*’ (male MS). This view suggests that MSs, understand that their work and behaviour set the tone, as opposed to how business, support services, and facilities are arranged.

Literature shows that men and women often have distinct political styles which are considered to be gendered and organised around traditional bifurcated masculine and feminine gender roles (Childs 2004).⁵¹ Female politicians have been found to consider

⁵⁰ Figure 9 Methodological note based on authors’ analysis: Proportion of interruptions: not statistically significant ($\chi^2=0.572$). Interventions ‘given’: statistically significant ($\chi^2=6.23$, $p<0.05$) with ‘Unknowns’ removed from calculations. Interventions ‘received’: statistically significant ($\chi^2=6.07$, $p<0.05$) with ‘Unknowns’ removed from calculations

⁵¹ Childs, S. (2004). *A Feminised Style of Politics? Women MPs in the House of Commons*. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6(1), pp. 3-19.

themselves more collaborative and cooperative, alongside wanting to cut through ‘pompous male rhetoric’ (von der Fehr et al. 2005) and preferring a ‘feminised political style’ that has been variously described as: kinder, less combative, less aggressive, measured, caring, practical, fact-driven, and honest (Norris 1996; Bochel and Briggs 2000; Lovenduski 2005; Hargrave and Langengen 2021).⁵²

Some observations, perhaps described as realist, demonstrate a view of politics as fundamentally competitive, and one in which formal policies have a limited role:

Because ... you can have all the policies you like, but unless people play nice, it doesn't mean anything. And in politics, fundamentally ... it's a competitive business in terms of personal objectives, but also in terms of political ideas and that's the nature, I mean that is just the rawness of it. You can't change that. That's what it's meant to be. It's just brutal (male MS)

For women interviewees, a more consensual and deliberative way of working was valued but there was a resigned acceptance that a more ‘performative’ politics was becoming prevalent. This meant that women were putting up with behaviour that can be viewed as undermining. We heard from a range of women that the culture in the Siambur is changing:

... when I first arrived as a newbie, they were really very supportive [female MSs, cross-party]. So, in that sense it was quite a good experience... but if you want to talk about now, I find that the Ya-boo kind of a politics that happens in the Siambur doesn't suit my style, and sometimes I think people ..tend to be a little bit dismissive of the ones who take a quieter, more collegiate, more cooperative, more persuasive and thoughtful way of getting things done (female MS)

I mean, there's a whole thing of, you know, men just speaking over you, not shouting, but using very loud voice. I mean, one of the things I've seen a lot of in the Chamber is if you're using notes, men will say, oh, you're reading from your notes. And I always think, well ... men and women use notes (female MS)

⁵² von der Fehr, D. et al. 2005. *Is There A Nordic Feminism?: Nordic Feminist Thought On Culture And Society*. Taylor & Francis.

Bochel, C. and Briggs, J. 2000. Do women make a difference. *Politics* 20(2), pp. 63-68.

Lovenduski, J. 2005. *Feminizing Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Norris, P. 1996. Women Politicians: transforming Westminster. *Parliamentary Affairs* 49(1), pp. 89-102.

Hargrave, L. and Langengen, T. 2021. The Gendered Debate: Do Men and Women Communicate Differently in the House of Commons? *Politics & Gender* 17(4), pp. 580-606. doi:

10.1017/S1743923X20000100

I find the character of the debates OK in Plenary. That is the most party political to a certain extent, it's always going to be robust debate, but you don't tend to have as much literal shouting and pointing at people as you do in Westminster. You know, I think that in Westminster it is very performative, and I think I regret that it seems to have shifted a little bit more towards that [in the Senedd] (female MS)

Members can be slightly dismissive, if your style is quieter, more thoughtful ... and sometimes you pick up on this as a bit of annoyance ... which can come from sexist attitudes (female MS)

There is a clear concern that a rowdier, point scoring politics, described by research participants as more akin to Westminster, will become a norm. This could have a deleterious impact on the ability to bring and debate evidence in a considered way - shifting the Senedd away from its founding principles of listening, exploring and, where possible, consensus building. Indeed, many interviewees remarked on the Siambr architecture being built to foster these ways of working, and said that they valued the way the space encouraged thoughtful debate (mourning its loss while they are in a temporary chamber to allow for its expansion).

These discussions also echoed comments about the Senedd still having a male dominated culture despite being comprised of 43% women, and women leading as First Minister and Llywydd. Clearly, women MSs were mindful that such representation is not guaranteed and they anticipated what the culture might be like if far fewer women are returned after the Senedd election of May 2026. This discussion needs to be considered by party machinery but we do not have specific recommendations for political parties, as this was outside our remit.

However, Members receive regular training on standards of conduct and the conventions of Plenary from Commission Services. Commission services have engaged extensively with Chiefs of Staff from political parties and Members to prepare new welcome and induction training for the Seventh Senedd. Further information is provided by Commission Services in Annex 1.

It is also worth recording that the Llywydd's management of Plenary, to ensure equal participation and impartiality, was commended by several research participants. MSs particularly noted that working remotely during the COVID pandemic had impacted on the nature and manner of engagement (making it more transactional), and that the Llywydd had helped to reestablish a culture of listening and considered debate.

Committee and Plenary work

In our research Members told us how much they valued committee work. They found it to be one of the most satisfying areas of their role, alongside their constituency work. Committee work was valued in part because of Members' aim to work in-depth on a subject and work to consensus on a cross-party basis. However, it was acknowledged that the business week had become extended, with committee business taking place on Wednesday mornings, Thursdays (often both mornings and afternoons), and for some Members Mondays and Tuesday mornings.⁵³ Members told us that committee preparation work often took place on a Sunday. This had the effect of squeezing their family and leisure time, and could have an impact on depth of scrutiny in committee work:

... ideally you'd want to have conversations outside of the meeting to prepare yourself to do some digging to get some context. You know, seldom do you get that chance. ... so the Senedd element of the job in itself, if you do that job as a backbencher conscientiously, that Senedd element is a full commitment (male MS)

The length of time that you have to sit in meetings, you know, committee meetings are five hours long (female MS)

It was suggested to us that given the length of Plenary, a five-minute break each hour or so would be welcome by MSs, and would act as an inclusion measure:

You're not supposed [take a break] if you're taking part in the debate. Well, sometimes debates are at least an hour long, and when we're doing legislation, they're hours long and we do have the odd break. But I know in the past I've had to kind of wink at the at the Presiding Officer... And I just think... If you had more, you know specific needs, if you had a disability, just God help you. I can only imagine how hard it would be. (female MS)

The discussion about long working hours is again apparent from the first of the indicative quotes above, and it is also worth noting that several members felt that the time invested in constituency and party work was often invisible, and therefore an unacknowledged and undervalued part of the role, both in terms of time commitment and impact.

⁵³ Regular Monday meeting slots have been used by the Legislation, Justice and Constitution, Equality and Social Justice, and Petitions Committees.

Part of the rationale of increasing membership from 60 to 96 Senedd Members was to address the unrealistic expectation that MSs could be on two or three committees – sometimes scheduled for the same time:

[Being a member of three committees] ... Well, you can't manage it. It's ludicrous. It's a ludicrous position for somebody to be put in (male MS)

...I think that in the committee system here ... you are expected to do too much to begin with. Everybody should only have to have one committee...
(female MS)

To address these concerns, committee membership has been reduced in the Sixth Senedd compared to that in previous Seneddau, but this in itself had increased risks of Committees becoming inquorate.

Members observed that the Committee Chair is an important role. The Chair sets the tone, style and culture of the committee, as well as having significant influence over the agenda. Often this was working well, but participants told us that the system for being appointed to committees of their choice was not always transparent, that there was a hierarchy of importance between committees:

They tend to be very, it's very competitive [referring to Economy Transport and Rural Affairs, Climate Change Environment and Infrastructure Committee]
(female MS)

Over time, some committees have become male or female dominated. This can impact on women's ability to have a voice on those committees viewed as most important or powerful (such as Economy, Agriculture and Climate), or for men's voices to be heard on the culture and education committees. It may also reduce the opportunity for women to raise equalities items in male dominated committees, and their ability to be effective when they do:

You can speak on something, come up with a good suggestion and then it's repeated by a man and it's taken seriously ... I found that sometimes to get heard, you have to make sure more that you've done your research, and then you find your moment and you'll come out with something... That will prove your point, because you've done that research rather than just come up with it the first time as a suggestion, then that's accepted (female MS)

These discussions raised the gender make up of committees and therefore their focus:

I think you cannot have a committee where you only see one sex represented, whether that's male or female (female MS)

... you have to have some balance on that [Committees] because it isn't just about trying to set the agenda. It's much more than that. It's about then thinking more widely about who you're going to ask to give presentations in terms of all information to help inform an inquiry. So it's about having the widest possible representation so that individuals on that committee, bring their experiences with them (female MS)

The Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee (noted above as a committee of strategic significance in the Senedd) is currently all male. Although participants noted, as part of a wider discussion about raising equality issues, that diversity is included in the legislative process by consciously including different voices as Committee witnesses, we also heard that single-sex committees, through the homogeneity of members, bring the inherent possibility of group think.

Bringing diverse knowledge and experience can increase the breadth and depth of discussion, leading to the opportunity to explore, for example, intergenerational conflicts, and can lead to better decision making if operational and organisation processes are managed effectively (Kirton and Greene, 2021).⁵⁴ To ensure inclusion we recommend that there should not be single sex committees. Optimally, there should be gender balance on committees but we are mindful that should women's representation decline in the Seventh Senedd, such a rule may result in women being required to be on several committees to reach gender balance (on a 60/40 ratio). This potential inadvertent consequence could be more likely if the number of committees expand in the Seventh Senedd.

It is hoped that expansion of the membership of the Senedd would mean that Members can be on one committee, benefiting work/life balance and enabling Members to build expertise by specialising in one policy or legislative area. Participants also hoped that the increased number of MSs might also provide an opportunity to have a larger range of Members undertaking committee work, and even enable the Senedd to break free of gender stereotyping:

So again, like if we're going to have more of us, great, let's have more of us on the committees have more [gender] balance on the committees and more voices on the committees, more opportunity to be quorate on the committees (female MS)

... one committee that you would specialise in and that would give more incentive or opportunity for women to concentrate on a subject that they may not have so much knowledge of because of the gendered nature of everything really, so I think that would help a lot (female MS)

⁵⁴ Kirton, G. and Greene, M. (2021) *The Dynamics of Managing Diversity and Inclusion: A Critical Approach* (5th edition), London: Routledge

Expansion comes with inherent dangers however, that there may not be more time, or the opportunity to specialise or address gender imbalances. We heard a number of times that with expanded Senedd membership, there is the possibility of having more Ministers to cover more portfolios (adding policy areas or breaking up existing combinations), which may in turn expand the number of committees:

.... the positives of next year [more elected members] is that there will be more of us and what I would hope that they don't do is that because there are more of us, they therefore expand the number of committees. Some would argue that we have plenty as it is now and ... we should be making it so that more people can sit on those committees (female MS)

Expanding numbers alone may not solve the impact on scrutiny of some Members being on several committees or struggling to ensure committees are quorate or gaining gender imbalance. There will need to be an intentionality, to set rules that avoid these issues from becoming barriers to inclusion and family friendliness in the expanded Senedd.

Evidence diversity monitoring

Since 2021, the Senedd has made efforts to better understand the extent to which those contributing to policy-making from beyond the Chamber are representative of the wider population in Wales, through 'Evidence data monitoring'. Partly gathered through voluntary surveys, the Senedd has sought to collect data about those submitting written evidence, providing oral evidence and participating in some of the Senedd's citizen engagement activity (such as focus groups, interviews and surveys). Data collected identifies both demographic characteristics and geographic representation. Further details are provided in Annex 1.

Having run the process across four consecutive years, response levels to surveys have varied with their lowest level of 18% in the first pilot year (2021-22). In the most recent year of data collection (2024-25), response rates were 36% (in line with the preceding year).

Analysis from the most recent round of data collection (2024-25) highlights an increase from previous years of those participating for the first-time.⁵⁵ Remote participation remained popular as did a preference for engagement in English. It was notable that there was a decrease in those identifying themselves as being from a disadvantaged background compared to the previous year (at 22% down from 27%), and a continued

⁵⁵ Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru (2025) Annex: Who gives evidence to committees? Evidence diversity monitoring data analysis, October 2025 (publication pending 2026).

high proportion of participants with degrees compared to the population average (at 90% compared to 32% of the population). There were more females than males (57% compared to 51% of the population), and more respondents with caring responsibilities in comparison to the population average (at 21% compared to 10% of the population). Notably, this was the first year where there was not a noticeable difference in the balance of women and men across committees. The level of respondents over 60 dropped to 25%, compared with 34% of the population. Respondents with a disability also settled from 23% to 16%, compared to 21% of the population. Otherwise, on most demographic indicators, the demographic make-up of respondents was largely in line with the population.

The Senedd appears to be alone in these efforts, although, following their own Gender Audit in 2023, the Scottish Parliament have recently started collecting data on committee witnesses.⁵⁶ It has been suggested that awareness of the Senedd's collection of evidence diversity monitoring is not widespread amongst Members. Increased awareness of this data collection– supported by guidance about how it strengthens policy-making – will reinforce understanding of the benefits of gathering evidence from a diverse range of people and organisations such that committees may be more deliberate in their invitations to provide evidence and engagement activities.

Board Recommendations: Equal Participation

- Recommendation: Senedd Commission services should collect data on inclusivity in Plenary debates by protected characteristic. This should include contributions, interruptions, interventions and whether requests for interventions are accepted, and whether contributions are made in person or online and in Welsh or English. An annual review of participation data should be considered by Business Committee.⁵⁷
- Recommendation: Business Committee should consider what changes can be made to Standing Orders to improve inclusivity on Committees. This would be based on: no single sex committees; and/ or the gender balance in each committee so far as is reasonably practical, reflecting the overall gender

⁵⁶ Scottish Parliament (2023) [A Parliament for All: Report of the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit](#)

⁵⁷ We note that in the Scottish Parliament, in an exercise was previously conducted over a six-week period between April and June 2022 to capture real-time data on the number of attempted interventions, the number of interventions accepted and not accepted and the gender split of data. However, we are also conscious that technology or AI may provide solutions rather than necessarily dedicating the Senedd Commission services' staff resources to record the data.

balance of Members representatives, or the gender balance once Cabinet roles have been removed from the calculation.

- Recommendation: The FFIPR Implementation Board should monitor any expansion in the number and size of committees in the Seventh Senedd and therefore the number of committees on which Members are expected to serve,
- Recommendation: Senedd Commission services should put in place an effective means of alerting the Llywydd immediately when a Member participating virtually online requests an intervention, for example a ‘Llywydd’s button’ – similar to that used in the Scottish Parliament.
- Recommendation: All committees should consider their evidence diversity data on an annual basis. Reports should be submitted to the Chairs’ Forum, which should continue to monitor the evidence diversity data annually.

Organisation and culture

Work-life balance

A Member of the Senedd’s working hours include set sessions for Plenary on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons and party or group meetings in the mornings. Additionally, Committee meetings take place on Wednesday mornings, Thursdays (often both mornings and afternoons), and for some Members Mondays and Tuesday mornings.⁵⁸ Constituency work usually takes place on Thursdays and Fridays, and often on Saturdays as well. There can also be Senedd or constituency events on weekday evenings. Travel to and from Cardiff if the MS is based in the intermediate or outer area from Cardiff (inner area), additionally absorbs considerable time.⁵⁹ In 2011, Assembly Members (as they were then called) reported working an average of 57 hours a week plus travel - up to 9 hours per week on average (Hansard Society 2011, in [Expert Panel on Electoral Reform](#) p.52/53). The assumption of the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990), one unencumbered by responsibilities outside of work, is baked into the role.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Regular Monday meeting slots have been used by the Legislation, Justice and Constitution, Equality and Social Justice, and Petitions Committees.

⁵⁹ Members living within a roughly 90 minute commute of Cardiff Bay are classed as living within the ‘Inner Area’ and are not entitled to claim for renting a property in Cardiff Bay. They are entitled to claim for overnight accommodation in a hotel on occasions. The rules governing these entitlements are set out in the [Determination on Members’ Pay and Allowances](#).

⁶⁰ Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jun., 1990), pp. 139-158

Culturally, this signals who can and can't be included, or rather '*how political institutions reinforce the gendered division of labour*' (Duncan 1996).⁶¹ This is also a gendered ideal imbued with social and economic advantage. How do workers without professional salaries afford to stand for election and manage family life once elected?

International standards

In relation to organisation and culture, international standards for gender-sensitive parliaments set by the IPU,⁶² CPA,⁶³ and OSCE⁶⁴ establish an ambition of making the role of a parliamentarian more attractive by ensuring they have a good work/life balance with resilient families, through:

- **Sitting hours** that are predictable, reflect 'core business hours', match school holidays, and allow MPs to spend more time at home with their families (e.g. by establishing compressed sitting weeks, creating schedules that start early, and avoid late voting).
- **Support for parents and carers** including the provision of paid parental and caring leave, access to childcare facilities, the option to participate virtually or via proxy or vote pairing, accepting parental leave as a legitimate reason for missing a sitting day, and access to breastfeeding space in the parliamentary building.

Summary of related Senedd policies

Sitting hours: Sixth Senedd business ought not to be timetabled before 9.00am and after 6.00pm (SO11.10). But late sittings are becoming more common (see Late Sittings below).

Support for parents and carers: Virtual and hybrid working, care cost allowances for 'sitting weeks', weekend and working during recess for each dependant; parental, maternity, paternity, or adoption leave at full salary and reimbursement costs such as employing an additional member of staff to cover Member's duties other than those which relate to formal Senedd business, which can be undertaken only by the Member themselves e.g. attending Plenary meetings. Members can miss a sitting with the permission of the Llywydd and vote by proxy or through pairing, proxy voting is also

⁶¹ Duncan, S. (1996) Obstacles to Successful Equal Opportunities Policy in the European Union, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4m pp. 399-422

⁶² IPU (2017) [Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments](#)

⁶³ CPA (2020) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards And A Checklist For Parliamentary Change](#)

⁶⁴ OSCE (2021) [Realizing Gender Equality In Parliament A Guide For Parliaments In The OSCE Region](#)

available to Members while on parental leave for up to seven months (see Annex 1 for a comprehensive list of Member support provision).

Not provided: A locum Member (or similar arrangement) to cover the full range of a Member duties, including formal Senedd business, and a suitable breastfeeding space in the parliamentary building (currently a shared space).⁶⁵

Managing Childcare responsibilities

Many of our participants talked of undertaking the role of an MS as a privilege and an honour. They demonstrated dedication to doing the best for their constituents while managing long-hours and an intense mixed role encompassing Senedd, constituency and party business.

Both men and women reported managing care responsibilities alongside their elected role. Members reported currently caring for parents or children or sometimes both, and taking an active role as grandparents. Former Members reported being unable to manage long hours and caring responsibilities among their reasons for leaving the Senedd. A clear pattern emerged from interviews with women - that when they had been the 'main carer' for children, they had viewed managing work and childcare as incompatible with the role of an MS, and had waited until their children were young adults or adults before seeking candidacy. Interestingly, several had been Councillors when their children were young and found that role to be conducive with managing work and care (less travel, fewer hours and often on-site childcare were available).

Currently there are very few parents of young children in the Senedd. Young fathers noted concerns about being absent while their children were young, and several male Members acknowledged and expressed gratitude that wives or partners were undertaking childcare or elder care, and therefore making it possible for them to be an MS.

Among the difficulties of balancing work and childcare for main carers (most often women), is attending evening events, the unpredictability of Plenary finishing times (discussed below) and rigid starting times:

Holding evening events on Plenary days makes it very difficult for those who want to go home to see their children before bedtime. There's a culture that assumes you don't need to do the school run in the morning with meetings starting before 9 (female MS)

⁶⁵ A Member can claim costs to cover additional staff to manage their work in their absence, but that during their leave that person is likely to only do constituency business as they cannot participate in Senedd business on behalf of the Member.

The strain of ‘doing the double day’ can be difficult to manage:

‘...But I find, especially for those things which are to do with your role as a carer, a caregiver... I think they could be sort of communicated more, you know, and they're not. You know, we're expected to just be these superhuman people....’ (female MS)

.... and so not so much now as I say, he's older because he does after school stuff and it's not the end of the world if he's been waiting a bit ... But it used to be very nerve wracking, you know, with whatever was happening ... [to make sure] I got back there to pick him up. (female MS)

We have termed what we heard from fathers’ as ‘father’s regret’ – with reports that they have or will miss out on putting children to bed, sports day or parents’ evenings:

... because obviously I want to be involved in my son's life, especially in these early years, you're not going to get this time back (male MS)

It's very difficult to contribute adequately to raising children when representing a constituency far from Cardiff (male MS)

Contrast these observations, with a reflection from a father that the Senedd culture has changed over time to be enabling, in respect of understanding men also have caring responsibilities:

[Looking across the various Senedd terms] ... I think the culture has changed and the technology enables us to do more and I think also there's a tolerance now which I didn't experience when I was a new parent... Which is, you know, the guy's got a kid. You know he's going to be late today or he's going to leave early tomorrow ... It's not spoken about, it's just life, you know, it's completely accepted. There's no sense of intolerance there. And I think there was a level of intolerance [previously] (male MS)

This culture change is welcome. In our research the debate about provision of creche and childcare facilities was ‘live’ as a separate study was being undertaken contemporaneously in respect of provision within the Senedd estate.

Crèche

Some MSs view the Senedd as lagging behind in childcare provision

You know, I just ... I couldn't believe that there wasn't a crèche in the Senedd when I was elected (female MS)

But these are tough questions that we're going to have to come up with an answer [to] I mean, we wax lyrical, I think in the Senedd around wanting better representation, to have people from more diverse backgrounds, whether that's people with disabilities, mothers or fathers or people with care responsibility for elderly parents as well but if they're not going to help facilitate those people who want to get involved in politics, then you know, it's not going to happen, is it? (male MS)

It is widely held that provision of childcare for Assembly Members was a promise made when the Assembly was established in 1998, to be a principled expression of Wales's modern and inclusive democracy. There was both disappointment and disbelief that, 26 years on, this early promise – although once realised – was no longer being upheld.⁶⁶ Some Members urged the Senedd to learn from other parliaments, including Westminster and Scotland which both have childcare facilities (although specifically for visitors and witnesses only in the case of the latter). Whilst provision for childcare in parliaments is not yet widespread,⁶⁷ there are examples such as in the New Zealand parliament/Pārmentia Aotearoa which boasts a developed infrastructure to support parents.⁶⁸ This demonstrates that provision is realistic and that it also sends a strong message about a commitment to inclusive democracy. Indeed, the symbolism – or 'signal' – of a crèche featured centrally for some, also to ensure that potential candidates could be assured that their practical needs as carers would be accommodated. More broadly, some Members stressed the significance of the Senedd being an inclusive setting where people are made to feel welcome.

Beyond – but including – these Members, a broader set of reflections stressed the need for the Senedd to provide a practical response to childcare needs.

I think a Tuesday and Wednesday, for example, would be a bit more manageable if there was access to a creche within the Senedd or some sort of childcare facility within the Senedd, which is something that, you know, with the original plans for the Senedd was meant to be there.... that we would pay our subscription or whatever it would be to access that support (male MS)

⁶⁶ Local off-site childcare for Members and their staff was trialled by the Senedd Commission in 2008; however, this provision was ultimately discontinued after five years given the low level of take-up (only five of the ten available spaces were used at any one time).

⁶⁷ A [2023 OSCE survey](#) with responses from 52 parliamentary chambers found 29% had childcare facilities and a [2024 survey](#) with responses from 24 parliaments found that 35% had childcare facilities.

⁶⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) [Babies on the Backbenches](#)

Notably, the emphasis was placed upon provision for Commission staff, in addition to Senedd Members. Amongst these MSs, some favoured a Senedd crèche that could be made available to, for example, staff from Cardiff Council and the Cardiff and Vale College.

Others were not attached to a Senedd crèche *per se*, focusing less on the means by which childcare was provided and more on its ultimate provision. One Member recalled a previous arrangement by which Assembly Members could access a local nursery, within a wider range of suggestions that off-site provision could be an option. Suggestions of childcare vouchers were also advanced. Notably, such vouchers would also support Members who were not able to make use of a Cardiff-based crèche. In turn, this would go some way to addressing the criticism that resource was unfairly concentrated in Cardiff. There was uncertainty about what childcare costs would be covered by the Remuneration Board's Determination, although it was noted that parents are reluctant to access this support anyway due to fear of negative public backlash.

The challenges attached to providing childcare 'round the edges' of parliamentary business were squarely acknowledged. Despite the commitment that all Senedd activity ought to close at 6pm, late sittings have become increasingly routine (see below). The need for flexibility was stressed, although was not viewed by all to preclude the establishment of a Senedd crèche.

The business case and Member concerns about public perception

The idea of establishing a Senedd crèche was also explicitly rejected by some Members in the interviews, with specific reference to the weak business case and the subsequent public perception of poor use of public funds. The case for establishing a crèche was challenged due to MSs only attending the Senedd on specific days (as opposed to throughout the week), a relatively small number living close enough to make use of a Cardiff-based facility and some Commission staff more often working from home (as opposed to the Bay). Also, there was a view that demand would be low given that few local MSs have pre-school age children.

With respect to establishing a Senedd crèche, rejection on business grounds cannot be reconciled with the view that the Senedd ought to express its principles through on-site childcare provision. However, there was a difference in understanding about how childcare would be funded. There was some assumption held that a Senedd crèche would be provided for free or at a significantly discounted rate. It was also believed that the Commission assumed that Members expected it to be free of charge, whilst others acknowledged that it would, indeed, be a service that users would pay for.

The benefits of ad hoc provision

Alongside the discussion of a Senedd crèche, participants showed enthusiasm for more ad hoc childcare provision. It was generally viewed that such provision would be valuable for visitors to the Senedd (including witnesses or those wishing to view a committee session or Plenary meeting) as well as MSs or Commission staff who might occasionally want short-term childcare provision after school (until the close of Senedd business).

... it's the sort of situation where if there had been a creche in the Senedd where you could drop children off – not to be looked after the whole day, but maybe just to wait for an hour or so while you finished your business – that would have been great (female MS)

Conclusion

The Senedd Commission commissioned a Crèche Feasibility Study in 2025 to assess the demand for, and space for an on-site crèche in the Senedd. It was decided that no space allocation would be made for on-site childcare provision at that time and that it would need to be accommodated from within.⁶⁹ However, the business case for childcare provision is being progressed, including investigating options relating to onsite childcare provision.

Whilst recognising this activity, the FFIPR foregrounds the Senedd's position at the heart of representative democracy in Wales, and draws on international examples of best practice in both ongoing and ad hoc/sessional childcare provision from a family-friendly and inclusive perspective. There is a risk that basing options for childcare provision on the current make-up of the Senedd (and current work practices of Commission staff) reinforces the status quo, as decisions about whether to stand for election or decide on patterns of work are currently based on the understanding that no childcare provision is available in the Senedd (for Members or Commission staff). This accepted reality is a far cry from the principle of an inclusive parliament. It also raises the question of whether the Senedd would be accepting of young children accompanying Members if no childcare was available – as parliamentarians have done in other settings with varying degrees of acceptance.⁷⁰ In addition, the lack of ad hoc provision (for visitors or witnesses, for example) is a notable absence when compared with Wales's sister parliament in Scotland.

⁶⁹ [Agenda for Senedd Commission on Monday, 3 November 2025, 10.30](#)

⁷⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) [Babies of the Backbenches](#)

Family Leave Policies

Elected members are public office holders, and not employed by the Senedd Commission. They also become employers upon election, when staffing their offices. It is therefore their decision about how much maternity, paternity, parental or adoption leave to take, and in the case of maternity leave, to take responsibility for their own health and safety assessment.⁷¹

However, Members did seek advice and support from Commission Services in relation to family leave options. Members wanted in-depth advice and to know what a 'standard' or acceptable amount of leave would be:

So, I mean, I understand there is some sort of paternity arrangement within the Senedd. I'm not very clear about it. Nobody's ... [explained it] (male MS)

... obviously [I] went to MBS to tell them that my wife was expecting and I would be looking to take paternity leave and the answer I got back on that is that, well, there's no specific policies, do what you want (male MS)

So I think there's I think there's a very clear case where actually having a more cast-iron policy would be very helpful because, you know, when one of the concerns I had was, well, if it's down to me what I think is proportional might not be proportional to somebody else. ... that opens up Members then for being criticised publicly about how much time they might have taken off or not taken off (male MS)

Members reported frustration with available advice as its provision is not within Commission Services remit. This highlights a disjuncture in organisational arrangements that became apparent on a range of matters throughout the interviews. The Senedd Commission can offer general advice but has no responsibility in this area, as Members are autonomous public role holders. However, our findings suggest the need for further advice and support that would assist Members with making their decisions. There is also a potential case study to consider, as one former Member has had an additional staff member to cover her maternity leave (with the exception of Senedd Business which must be conducted by the elected Member). It would be informative for the Senedd Commission to learn from this example, and to reflect on how the experience could be enhanced to create a world leading family friendly Parliament. The Senedd Commission could undertake a case study and summarise best practice from around the world leading to the development of a Maternity and Paternity leave policy. The political parties also have an important role to play in advice and support for Members taking Maternity, Paternity, and Parental Leave.

⁷¹ [HSE health and safety risk assessment](#)

The caution, highlighted in the quotation above regarding the potential for criticism from the public for taking family leave, also extends to Members' concerns about claiming the out of hours childcare allowance (for late Plenary sittings) as this would be shown on the public record. In actuality, these claims are anonymised in the Sixth Senedd Determination. This demonstrates both a lack of understanding about what is available, and concern about public reaction to legitimate expense claims in relation to caring. All of which can have a deleterious effect on balancing work life and family life.

Caring for Parents or other family members

Several participants relayed that they had, or were currently providing, caring support for older people, siblings or close friends. Members managed these situations with difficulty, again wanting to fulfil their duties to their constituents, parties, scrutiny work and to be able to provide caring support.

[With respect to managing caring responsibilities and the job] ... I try and do my best, but I'll be honest, it has proven to be a struggle. I've been really fortunate that my group understands (female MS)

[Regarding juggling work and a significant caring responsibility] ... I'm not going to lie. It was exhausting (female MS)

Although MSs were quick to acknowledge the collegiate culture between Members (even across parties), there was also a tangible pressure for Members to present themselves as autonomous individuals, largely unattached from any obligations beyond their Senedd role. The absence of a mechanism that allows MSs to leave their Senedd duties swiftly in the event of a family emergency or other exceptional event – assumes that MSs do not have responsibilities beyond the Senedd. Over time, this will lead to a reduction in those with caring roles from considering standing in the Welsh legislature.

When a family member was seriously or terminally ill, Members often managed through using hybrid working, without which managing the 'double day' would not have been possible:

But if I wasn't able to work virtually, it would be absolutely impossible (female MS)

Remote working is absolutely essential for me to continue fulfilling my duties as a Member (female MS)

The support of their political party and Llywydd for working and /or voting virtually was seen as essential. However, not all MSs, and not only those without caring

responsibilities, can or want to make use of hybrid working, viewing the institution as being comprised of the Members, who should be present:

I'm allowed to do whatever I want as a, as a Member, but I very much see my role as being down here in this place. Physically. I think it's an important part of representation. I think buildings and spaces are important in what they represent, and they're not just spaces to house people, but they are important indicators of authority and power. And if you're not in that place, I think you're probably not fulfilling your duty properly. There are instances where they [Members] may be able to not be able to fulfil that. I accept that and, but I think you should be in this place (male MS)

This suggests working in a hybrid fashion should not be a norm but then, this would preclude Members with on-going caring responsibilities. There is an extended discussion on hybrid working below. However, we noted from the interviews that the rigid organisation of business, plenaries on set days and times, can cause issues for Members. An MS receiving an emergency call about a relative's health or involvement in an accident, cannot simply leave Plenary or quickly organise a pair for voting, nor vote remotely, say from an A&E waiting room. We recommend that there should be a plan that will allow MSs to leave the *Siambwr* at short notice.

We also observed the same reluctance to claim for out of hours care for family members as for childcare (late Plenaries, required to attend events):

There's an additional resource that members with caring responsibilities can use. [...] some Members, particularly women, were reluctant to use it because of the way in which expenses can be presented in the press [...] I think you need the collective buy-in of all Members so that isn't then used as a political football (female MS).

Concern over the public not understanding why MSs would need to have these costs reimbursed was a barrier, and again, that this is expenditure is not reported individually, was not widely known.

Working Remotely and Hybrid Working

In 2022, Members voted to extend the temporary measure for virtual participation introduced during the pandemic. The Business Committee argued that maintaining the ability to attend Plenary and Committee on a [hybrid working](#) basis facilitated parental leave, undertaking caring responsibilities, could encourage a greater range of diverse candidates in future elections ([Smith and Childs, 2021](#)) and a reduction in travel costs and carbon emissions. [Guidance](#) has recently been updated to clarify remote voting arrangements and the etiquette of engaging remotely. For instance, Members must give

advance notice of their intention to vote remotely and must participate from a private indoor location and must be in person for Bill amending stage proceedings.

Hybrid working does not infer workload adjustment but those most likely to work remotely or on a hybrid basis, parents, carers and disabled people, may be able to juggle their responsibilities more easily (Hibbs 2022).⁷² Research shows that hybrid working, mainly available for white collar, managerial and professional workers, has led to enhanced or reduced productivity, and increases or decreases in chances of gaining promotion (Felstead 2023).⁷³ Besides enhancing access or maintaining attachment to the labour market or a role, outcomes in relation to progression and promotion while working in a hybrid working pattern, are situation specific. There are numerous reports from the early part of this decade advocating the benefits of hybrid working in political institutions, (IPU, 2022) but we have not been able to find research specifically assessing the impact of 'proximity bias' as having the potential to create disadvantage for progression and promotion in politics, as evidenced in other sectors (People Management, 2024).

Members of the Senedd expressed both appreciation and enthusiasm for hybrid working, but there were also reservations. As noted above, some Members told us that given their caring responsibilities, they would not be able to continue in their role without the opportunity to participate virtually for some of the time. The availability of hybrid working maintains attachment to their role for some Members. It should be retained as a family friendly and inclusive measure. Efforts should be made to protect hybrid working arrangements, and to demonstrate its value as equivalent to in person attendance. It is also a safety net for unexpected occurrences:

There are so many reasons why you would need suddenly to work from home or another place, ... I don't think that we can do without it. I just don't think it would be fair (female MS)

We also heard about how working virtually benefits engagement by removing geographical barriers and increasing the diversity of participants:

So, I'm a great fan of the sort of hybrid forums that I chair, cross party groups, you get far more people together and that's geographically in terms of accessibility, diversity, hybrid working (female MS)

I think [hybrid] is essential. I mean not as a first choice because it's much better if you can be there yourself in person. I think you get a lot more from it and you're able to contribute a lot more. But I just think it's essential to have it

⁷² Hibbs, L. (2022) "[I was able to take part in the chamber as if I was there](#)" – women local councillors, remote meeting attendance, and Covid-19: a positive from the pandemic?. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 26(1), pp. 6-23.

⁷³ Felstead, A (2022) *Remote Working: A Research Overview*, London: Routledge

there as a backup for people who've got caring responsibilities and who can't... [be there in person] (female MS)

However, there were differences of opinion regarding hybrid working, as discussed above, some Members expressed concern about its continuous use. And as observed in the last quotation, and in research elsewhere (Hibbs 2022), Members may feel that they have more impact by being in person.⁷⁴ Hybrid working can also mean missing out on building connections with colleagues:

Or in the corridor, or when you're waiting for the committee to start, those little conversations can lead to working together on policy stuff, you know, and getting things done. It's all of that you lose' (female MS)

There is also both understanding of the need for hybrid working and some irritation.

... because you also have to keep a balance, otherwise you could end up with everyone claiming they've got a reason for not coming in to vote, or not staying in to vote or not coming into committee (female MS)

Several participants observed that Members living in the inner area who travel to Cardiff Bay, left Cardiff before afternoon debates were concluded to 'nip home' and then vote virtually. It is not known if this behaviour is related, or always related, to care provision, for example, to ensure that a parent is present when children arrive home from school or to provide an evening meal for an unwell relative. Certainly, for Members who are not staying in Cardiff overnight, it can be a long working day:

[legislation debates] ... it will push the time sometimes to 8:00. So, if you're living in an area where you need to go home ... most childcare finishes at 6:00. So you've got two hours, well, more, because you're not even leaving here [until 8.00] ... where you're going to have to think round how you do that. Of course, this is where hybrid working comes in.... (female MS)

Interviewees were also concerned about the potential impact of hybrid working on scrutiny, which should be monitored:

You know, if you're scrutinising a Minister, you've got to be in the same room as them, you've got to be able to interrupt them, basically, and you can't do that online... ... [if] there are no witnesses to be brought in, it's just the

⁷⁴ Hibbs, L. (2022) "[I was able to take part in the chamber as if I was there](#)" – women local councillors, remote meeting attendance, and Covid-19: a positive from the pandemic?. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 26(1), pp. 6-23.

committee working on camera by itself, that's perfect for hybrid working. That works well... (male MS)

It could also be that there is a growing gap between the hybrid working policy and actual practice - with informal pressure to attend being applied:

The problem is though, is that what we're told is not what was written down ... it's meant to be a hybrid workplace ... In reality we have weekly pressure upon us to be in... So, it's difficult when we feel like we have to constantly keep fighting to actually be able to use hybrid when we need it (female MS)

The considerations discussed here about the overuse of hybrid working or indeed it not being as readily available as the policy states, may have informed the recently updated [guidance](#) from the Llywydd. From a family-friendly and inclusion perspective, it is pleasing to see that the new guidance reiterates the importance of virtual attendance as enabling work/life balance and does not forestall going home to vote except when there is a second stage amendment on a bill. Conscious of the potential for virtual working to have a deleterious impact on the main carer's career, the guidance sets out a clear intention that there should be equity between in-person and virtual participation. It would be advisable to monitor whether 'presenteeism' erodes the facility for hybrid working over time, and whether career progression is negatively impacted for women, the main users of hybrid working.

Hybrid working was overwhelmingly supported, and used by many Members to facilitate work-life balance. This facility is viewed as an essential component of a family-friendly and inclusive parliament.

Reasonable Adjustments

With regard to promoting inclusion, Members can claim the costs for reasonable adjustment allowances wherever they are incurred. For instance, in relation to employing a member of staff or in constituency matters (see Determination Annex 1). However, some members were not sure about the accessibility of the Senedd estate and cited instances where ensuring access had been suboptimal. They also wanted more advice about what kinds of reasonable adjustments they could make for their staff, and how to ensure that reasonable adjustments were available for them at outside meetings and events (hearing loops, BSL translator). For example:

I [needed] to do something in BSL. But there was no guidance... [T]here's no kind of template like, you know, a constituency engagement ... good practice. You know ... MBS engage with you, you can find people who can advise you on

this type of thing. But I think that that should be far more embedded and easy for members (Focus Group).

Members identified and appreciated areas of support from the Commission, singling out Security and Senedd Research for praise but they expressed some frustrations connected with the existing rules, the communication of new policies and the depth and consistency of advice. As discussed in sections above on culture and participation, some allowances are not being claimed in anticipation of public backlash, and in other cases more in-depth assistance is required.

Late sittings

The creep towards later sittings

The twice-weekly Plenary meetings bring all MSs together, with MSs participating in person or remotely. The Business Committee, chaired by the Llywydd/Presiding Officer, is required by Standing Orders to publish a schedule of Plenary and committee meetings as well as recess dates at least six months in advance (SO11.9).

Within this broader timetable, there is a requirement to consider both constituency and family responsibilities in the timetabling of business. The Senedd's Standing Orders currently provide that:

11.10 Timetables under Standing Order 11.9 must have regard to the family and constituency or electoral region responsibilities of Members and their likely travel arrangements; and should normally seek to avoid timetabling business before 9.00am or after 6.00pm on any working day.⁷⁵

Meetings are held on a Tuesday and Wednesday, from 1.30pm; however, despite a principled intention to keep more family-friendly hours, there has been a consistent creep towards Plenary meetings ending later over the past ten years, from an average end time of 5.59pm in 2015 to an average end time of 6.36pm in 2025 (see figure 10).

Looking over the past few years, on average, Plenary sessions closed around 6.30pm with the vast majority closing before 7.30pm but a handful closing after 8pm. Depending on the agenda item, MSs may be required by their party groups to attend in person (specifically when bills are in Stage 3).

⁷⁵ Senedd, Standing Orders, 11.9

Metric	Fifth Senedd						Sixth Senedd				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Mean end time	18:20	18:18	18:27	18:20	18:45	18:20	18:16	18:13	18:31	18:33	18:36
Latest finish	19:27	20:20	20:23	20:04	21:52	20:17	19:41	19:50	20:01	20:51	20:46
Proportion within an hour of 6.30	92%	81%	81%	84%	65%	75%	87%	87%	88%	74%	96%
Post-8pm	0	2	2	1	8	1	0	0	1	4	1
Post-9pm	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 10: End times for Plenary meetings in the fifth and sixth Senedd⁷⁶

Late and unpredictable: From ‘no issue’ to ‘major issue’

In practical terms, MSs had mixed views about late sittings. For some Members it caused no concern whatsoever. In a view shared by others who were staying in Cardiff away from home, one Member stated,

For me, [Plenary finish time] makes no difference whatsoever. I'm staying here overnight. Whether we sit until 5:00pm or finish at 9:00pm, I've still got to be down here... (male MS)

For others, there were very practical challenges attached to both a later – and unspecified – a finish time. Members variously cited caring responsibilities and also safety concerns, specifically using public transport at night as a lone woman. With respect to the former, this challenge was exemplified in two reflections from different MSs about caring for younger and older children,

Let's say I had a young child who I had to bring in to, to the Senedd on Tuesday. Then Wednesday I'd have to get them into the creche. I'd have to get them into the creche before 9 o'clock and I'd have to ... tell them I have no idea what time I might pick them up. I should be able to pick them up at six o'clock, but I might not (male MS)

... when I was elected, there were still children at home. And yes, it was very difficult basically because of the unpredictability - one of the main things I found was the unpredictability of the length of Plenary. You didn't exactly know when you'd be able to leave, so you didn't exactly know if you were able to be home for, you know, parents evenings, concerts, whatever...(female MS)

Notwithstanding these lived experiences of Members who struggle to balance a demanding and unpredictable timetable, there was a general appreciation of the difficulties of covering the necessary parliamentary business. As articulated by one Member,

⁷⁶ With thanks to the Senedd Commission for this data collection and analysis.

Our votes are late. I don't know how we get around that really. The votes have got much, much later as we've caught up on business. Even if you're at home, I think that's hard. It's really at 7:00pm - 8:00pm. But I don't know. I don't know what we do about that (female MS)

Another Member couched her acceptance of late sittings in the broader context of Plenary work,

... I always feel that I don't mind having that long day purely because they're only few and far between. They're not that often, but when they do happen, particularly for legislation ... that's fine - it comes with the territory (female MS)

Senedd practice and the assumption that MSs are not carers

The principles adopted to ensure the Senedd's activity respects a more family-friendly pattern of work have gradually been undermined. Whilst this slippage has taken place in the context of a heavy parliamentary agenda, there is an in-built assumption that must be acknowledged: that MSs do not have primary caring responsibilities for children, grandchildren or parents.

The length and predictability of the Senedd's business day are of fundamental importance to promoting a family friendly and inclusive Senedd. Quite simply, it is not possible for an individual with caring responsibilities to fulfil their duties as an MS if they are routinely expected to be in Plenary meetings outside the working day. Given that parliamentary business must be prioritised, those with caring roles will not consider standing for elections which will, over time, strip the Senedd of these (predominantly female) voices.

Accommodating absence: Proxy voting and pairing

I remember ... when my child [had an important school event] ... And I couldn't get [a pair]. I was asking for a pair... And my husband was working away, so there was no one else and... Yeah, I remember being tearful and, you know, being told, "No, there's no pair". And I felt like sort of saying, "Right, I'm going to resign!". You know, it was the pressure because I knew how important it was to my child. So I know that can happen with any job. But I think in any other job, you can take time (female MS)

Formal and informal mechanisms

Proxy voting and pairing are both practical responses to Member absence. The former was introduced in the Senedd on a trial basis in March 2020 specifically for cases of parental leave (National Assembly for Wales, Business Committee 2020),⁷⁷ and was made permanent and extended to cover long-term illness, caring responsibilities and bereavement leave in 2023. An application for proxy voting must be approved by the Presiding Officer and allows an absent Member to nominate another Senedd Member to vote on their behalf.⁷⁸ See Annex 1 for a policy summary.

The introduction of proxy voting has principled underpinnings in the Senedd, as a mechanism for a more representative and inclusive parliament (Childs 2016),⁷⁹ and is now an acknowledged and utilised feature of the Standing Orders (SO12.41A-G).

It has been used by both women (five times) and men (four times) since its introduction in 2020, with four cases relating to parental leave, four cases relating to long-term illness and one case of bereavement. This formalised approach to managing Member absence is acknowledged as a valuable tool to accommodate a longer-term change in life circumstances; however, it has limitations.

Specifically, this mechanism cannot fully respond to more urgent cases such as when a Member is urgently called from a Plenary meeting. This gap in provision was felt keenly by those in a caring role. Indeed, many such Members expressed anxiety about how to respond in a case where a family member had fallen, had been hospitalised or otherwise faced an emergency.

Given both the criteria and the lead time required for approval of a proxy, when a Member wishes to be absent from a Plenary meeting at short notice, the only option available is to search for a pair in another party (to effectively cancel out a non-vote). Notably, pairing is wholly informal. Whilst it is certainly a welcome additional

⁷⁷ National Assembly for Wales, Business Committee (2020) Amending Standing Orders: Standing Order 12 – Proxy Voting, March 2020:

<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s101203/11%20March%202020%20-%20Amending%20Standing%20Orders%20Standing%20Order%2012%20-%20Proxy%20Voting.pdf>

⁷⁸ Welsh Parliament, Senedd Business (2026) Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament, January 2016:

https://senedd.wales/media/n33df5ry/english_digital.pdf

Welsh Parliament, Chamber Secretariat (2025) Guide to Plenary, October 2025:

https://senedd.wales/media/3vvcbm1p/guide-to-plenary_public_eng.pdf

Welsh Parliament, Chamber Secretariat (2025) Guidance on Virtual and Hybrid Proceedings Issued by the Llywydd under Standing Order 6.17, November 2025: <https://senedd.wales/media/jsikxstu/guidance-on-virtual-and-hybrid-proceedings-english.pdf>

Welsh Parliament, Senedd Business (2025) Guidance on the proper conduct of Senedd Business Issued by the Llywydd under Standing Order 6.17, February 2025:

https://senedd.wales/media/ncvphjui/collation_of_guidance_eng.pdf

⁷⁹ Childs, S. (2016) The Good Parliament,

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/reference-group-representation-inclusion/good-parliament-report-july-2016.pdf>

mechanism for Members, successful pairing is largely dependent upon the discretion of party whips and cannot be relied upon.

Conclusion

This section of the report has covered an extensive range of work-life balance issues that impact on Members: childcare, caring for other dependents, late sittings, and some of the family measures in place to assist MSs to manage work and life. These include virtual and hybrid working, proxy voting and pairing, and the provision of caring allowances. Suggested improvements to these measures are provided below.

Board Recommendations: Work-life balance

Recommendation: Based on a proposal from the Llywydd, the Senedd should affirm a parental leave policy, encompassing maternity, paternity, adoption and miscarriage leave. This would be based upon:

- discussion between political groups, and
- informed by both:
 - Business Committee considerations;
 - discussion with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
 - Senedd Commission services having identified best practice in relation to taking leave, including that in other Parliaments.

This policy would:

- encompass how the health and safety arrangements for pregnant Members are covered in relation to working in and outside of the Senedd, including any property, staff or services required in;
- provide guidance to Members in deciding appropriate leave length and other arrangements; and
- encompass existing relevant procedural matters such as proxy voting – including the maximum length of time available for use of proxy voting.

Recommendation: Following the agreement of this policy, Senedd Commission services should make information and guidance available on it to Members and take

steps to publicise it. The Senedd Commission services should also provide for a person(s) that Members can contact for guidance on sensitive issues related to this policy. Members should also be able to seek guidance on relevant aspects of the Independent Remuneration Board's Determination (such as the allowance for extra staff to cover work).

Recommendation: If a committee is established under section 7 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act, to explore the possibility of job sharing of roles in the future, it should explore the potential for a Locum Member being able to undertake the full range of a Member's work, including Senedd business, while a Member is unavailable.

Recommendation: The Llywydd and Business Committee are invited to consider the introduction of a regular 'Announcements' agenda item at the start of each Plenary meeting which would give greater visibility to what Members' may be experiencing in their personal lives. This is common practice in local government and provides an opportunity for condolences, congratulations, and to acknowledge other personal matters.

Recommendation: Business Committee should establish a procedure for Members leaving Plenary in an emergency (with a specific definition of what constitutes an emergency). In the event of a Member having to leave in an emergency, the outcome of a vote should not be dependent on whether that Member could find a pairing at short notice.

Recommendation: Business Committee should establish a predictable and family-friendly end time for Plenary. Deviations from this end time should be exceptional, with advance notice provided to Members if sessions are likely to run beyond this time. There should be provision for business not reached by the end of one plenary session to carry over into the next plenary session. Business Committee should review data on plenary end times, in particular late sittings on a regular basis. Business Committee should consider it alongside the plenary participation monitoring data to enable consideration of the impact of plenary timings on participation.

Recommendation: Business Committee should safeguard the option of virtual participation in Senedd Business in the next Senedd, affirming it as having the same value as in person attendance. There should be monitoring of whether the use of hybrid working impacts on women gaining promoted posts.

Recommendation: The Senedd should commit to the principle of the Senedd as an accessible, inclusive and family-friendly institution.

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should commit to the principle of childcare provision in the Senedd for Members, staff and witnesses and - by at least the first year of the Seventh Senedd - have explored and developed all options. There should be a dedicated room for breastfeeding.

Recommendation: Business Committee, in collaboration with political groups, should develop a definition of the role of a Chief Whip (as distinct from Business Manager). This may encompass matters such as legislative planning, parliamentary discipline and supporting the welfare of their group's Members.

Proposed changes to the organisation of business for Seventh Senedd

Commitment to family friendly and inclusive working was a live discussion during the research period, specifically in relation to hybrid-working, the provision of a creche and job-sharing. The Llywydd and the Business Committee reinforced the commitment to hybrid working, the Bay 32 project considered accommodation needs for the Seventh Senedd, and work is ongoing to consider options for childcare provision (see Creche discussion above).⁸⁰ This section of the report reflects on other proposed Business Committee changes, to better manage business in an enlarged Seventh Senedd and our participants' reflections on the proposed changes.

Job-Sharing Proposals

Discussions of the potential of job-sharing as a family friendly, diversity and inclusion measure, originates in the report of the [Expert Panel on Electoral Reform \(2017\)](#). The panel argued that job-sharing of political roles and job-sharing of executive roles could increase access to elected office and promoted posts particularly for candidates with caring responsibilities, older and disabled candidates. [WEN Wales \(2022\) Job Sharing for Senedd Members](#) noted that this idea has been gaining traction internationally, and there were extensive examples of executive role sharing in Ireland, and in Welsh Local Government but could find no examples of sharing of parliamentary roles.

The Senedd Business Committee agreed in September 2025 to put a temporary Standing Order to Members in March 2026, which will establish a job-share trial for

⁸⁰ This is a project to secure the long-term office accommodation needs of the Senedd, Commission and Welsh Government in the Bay, and support the conduct of Senedd business in the Senedd building. The driver for the work the current Ty Hywel lease ending in 2032.

Committee Chairs in the Seventh Senedd. If agreed, the Seventh Senedd's Business Committee will be able to propose that up to three committees can have two Members nominated or appointed to share the Committee Chair role.

Section 7 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 requires the Llywydd to table a motion which proposes that a committee is established to consider job-sharing in terms of two people undertaking the role of a Member, and in relation to other relevant roles. The Seventh Senedd will decide on whether to establish this committee.

Legislative changes to the Government of Wales Act 2006 would be required to enable two people to jointly undertake the role of a Member.

In our interviews with Senedd Members there was much support for the sharing of Committee Chair roles. Members viewed this a key mechanism for increasing diversity of participation within the Senedd. There were also dissenters who would prefer to see Vice Chairs appointed. In response to this suggestion, some Members argued that Vice Chairs could undermine consensus; decisions must be made jointly by co-chairs.

There was enthusiasm for job-sharing the MS role arguing that it would increase participation for older MSs and disabled MSs, women and single parents. Within the enthusiastic supporters, there were a range of views about how it could work, with some seeing no issues as long as roles and good communication strategies were agreed at the outset. Other participants were keen to see this measure but were not sure how it would work. Would there be designated roles (constituency/Senedd) or policy role division, or genuinely sharing of all parts of the role and joint decision making? Several Members were completely against the idea of MSs job-sharing, not seeing it as compatible with accountability responsibilities.

The Business Week – options to be considered by Seventh Senedd

In May 2025, the Future Senedd Committee set out options for the conduct of formal and informal parliamentary business in an enlarged Senedd, with an express intention to create a family-friendly and inclusive culture, by making:

.... finish times and the pattern of business as predictable as possible, as the uncertainty that currently exists around Plenary finish times in particular creates a barrier for some Members, or prospective Members, due to its impact on their ability to fulfil caring, or other, responsibilities. ([Future Senedd Committee, 2025](#))

The Committee also intended that backbench MSs should have more opportunity to contribute to debate, this includes restricting the amount of time spokespeople take in proceedings. As one of our interviewees remarked:

Ministers go on too long (female MS)

As noted above (Plenaries and Committees), the increase in MS numbers will not necessarily mean less committee work (Members being on two or more Committees) or increase time for scrutiny if the number of Committees is expanded. The Future Senedd Committee notes this too. Based on our findings, the expansion of Members alone may not reduce the number of committees MSs attend unless there is intentionality to make the work manageable. Similarly, there is a requirement that the Seventh Senedd consider changes to Plenary to accommodate an enlarged Senedd and therefore coverage of more formal business. Those considerations include:

- Option 1: Status quo;
- Option 2: An additional Plenary session each week; and
- Option 3: Multi-week.

Given the research set out here on the importance of working arrangements for managing caring arrangements and increasing diversity, these proposals should now be tested against what Members say that they need to maintain attachment to the role.

Board Recommendation: Senedd Reform proposals

Recommendation: The Business Committee and Llywydd should actively involve the FFIPR Implementation Board in discussions on Seventh Senedd reform proposals to ensure that they are equality impact assessed before they are put to the Senedd for decision. This would include proposals on the planning of the business week, job share trials and other changes to the way Members do business. Any substantive changes should undergo ‘scenario testing’ using the lens of promoting family-friendly and inclusive working.

Abuse of Members: Beyond a ‘Cost of Doing Politics’

Please note, this section of the report explores experiences and the impact of violence, abuse, and harassment of politicians, including discussions of death and rape threats.

This section of the report first discusses behaviours within the Senedd that extended beyond ‘robust’ political styles into abuse, bullying, harassment or intimidation between Members. Member-on-Member abuse, or serious incidents between Members and political support or Senedd Commission staff, were not commonly a primary focus of responses around abuse and harassment, though were discussed by some former and current Members.

Data, instead, suggested more widespread concern about abuse from the public. Consequently, this section then explores Senedd Members' first-hand experiences of violence, abuse, and harassment *from the public*.

This is found to take various forms and take place in both offline and online spaces, with the latter now a key concern for current Members. Impacts of these experiences are considered here, with negative experiences found to take a serious toll on Members and those close to them – specifically, here, on their family members and on their political staff. There are also significant consequences shown here for democracy and for diversity in political representation, in terms of both descriptive and substantive elements (Håkansson 2024).⁸¹ Finally, this section discusses Members' perceptions of how such incidents are handled by Senedd Security and Welsh police forces before considering solutions and recommendations.

Standards of Conduct and Incidents Within the Senedd

Earlier in this report, we've discussed the 'political styles' adopted or preferred by Members, and some Members' concerns about 'Ya-boo' politics becoming more prevalent in the Siambwr. Negative behaviours extending beyond this, which spilled over into abuse, harassment, bullying, and/or intimidation, were discussed less by participants here, but remained a concern for some.

The Senedd requires Members to act in accordance with its Code of Conduct which sets out 'standards of conduct required of Members of the Senedd' and further demands that Members must also 'comply with the Standing Orders of the Senedd'.⁸² Within the Code of Conduct, Members are required to follow various principles, including '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.

In addition to this, the Code of Conduct includes a number of rules regarding behaviour which Members must follow. For example, they must:

- 'not act or behave in a manner that brings the Senedd or its Members into disrepute (Rule 3)
- 'not engage in unwanted behaviour, harassment, bullying, or discrimination' (Rule 4),

⁸¹ Håkansson, S. 2024. [The Gendered Representational Costs of Violence against Politicians. Perspectives on Politics.](#)

⁸² Senedd Cymru [Code of Conduct](#) (2021)

- ‘not subject anyone to personal attack in a manner that would be considered excessive or abusive by a reasonable and impartial person’ (Rule 6),
- ‘take reasonable measures to ensure their staff [...] also uphold and act in accordance with these Rules and the Overarching Principles’ (Rule 24).

As aforementioned, Members are further required by the Code of Conduct to follow the Standing Order rules. These govern and set expectations of political behaviour, with the Llywydd managing these and ensuring they are met during debate in the Siambr.

The Senedd also has a clear Dignity and Respect Policy which lays out expected behaviour for Members, Commission staff, Members’ Support staff, as well others who work with the Senedd such as contractors and those otherwise present on the Senedd estate.⁸³ It covers activity ‘related to their work, whether that is on Senedd premises, in a Member’s constituency or regional office, or elsewhere’, including on social media.

Behaviour Beyond ‘Robust’ Politics

In our research with Members, we heard there were occasions when Members were perceived to ‘have gone too far’, acting beyond acceptable parliamentary language or in ways that contravened either the Standing Orders or the Code of Conduct:

Everybody has the right to speak, but there are rules that govern, what we call parliamentary language and people can be and are called up and made to apologise if they have gone too far (female MS)

There was concern, too, about balancing the requirement for free speech with ensuring that rules of dignity and respect were adhered to when discussing equalities:

... there are so many avenues and opportunities [for] people to push particular agendas, anti-equality dressed up in a question, that we have to really watch it and I am concerned about the next Senedd (female MS)

Members were further worried about new, elected Members in the next Senedd understanding their responsibilities in the Siambr, adhering to expectations themselves and with respect to behaviour of their staff (see Rule 24 above):

After the May election ... [we may have] a large number of staff members who may have a different culture as well. So how that will influence ... the culture in the whole building. It's going to be something which we need to keep an eye on. ... I think it's about making sure we enforce the dignity and respect policies because if they don't respect the Chair in the Chamber, then there's chaos (male MS)

⁸³ [Dignity and Respect Policy as agreed 2018](#) by then National Assembly for Wales.

I would think, however, that if staff are not respecting dignity [...] the Member can be asked to ensure their employees technically behave responsibly. It's then for the Members to ensure that takes place. But I don't think many Members understand that (male MS)

It is important to note here that we did not interview or survey Senedd staff or Members' political support staff as part of this review and thus cannot comment widely on these potential avenues of abuse harassment, bullying or intimidation. We recommend therefore that this should be covered by the FFIPR Implementation Board during the next Senedd.

Further to the evidence discussed thus far, we also asked, in our survey, whether current Senedd Members had experienced abuse and harassment between Members and/or staff. Despite the small survey response rate (11 Members), 40% of respondents stated that they 'had experienced any abuse, harassment, or intimidation from a fellow Member or Senedd staff member', though all refrained from providing further details beyond: "Yes, from [name/role]". It must be noted here that our survey asked Members to reflect on their *entire time* as an elected Member, rather than experiences in a certain limited timeframe, such as the current Senedd term. In comparison, the Senedd's recent (Autumn 2025) Dignity and Respect Survey⁸⁴, which had a low response rate of 12% (7 Members), asked Members to reflect on any 'inappropriate behaviour [experienced] in the last 12 months'. 12% of Member respondents to that survey stated they had experienced inappropriate behaviour on multiple occasions, and 14% had observed inappropriate behaviour, with Members more likely to have experienced or observed this from fellow Members (or Member Support Staff whose behaviour is the responsibility of Members as per Rule 24 above).

Qualitative data collected from former Senedd Members through their survey elicited more forthright discussions of abuse and harassment from those within the Senedd, and some recounted serious incidents involving fellow Members which contravened the Codes of Conduct. These were clearly gendered, with female former Members discussing 'overly aggressive' behaviour, intimidation, as well as sexual harassment including being 'groped' and 'propositioned', something perceived as being linked to alcohol consumption by male Members at events. They also shared experiences of receiving 'inappropriate comments' and being 'objectified', 'sexualised', and generally made to feel uncomfortable, with remarks on their appearance and clothing. All these incidents were attributed to male Members.

The detail provided by female former Members, some of whom stood down as recently as 2021, suggests a culture of unacceptable gendered behaviours from male Members in previous Senedd terms. Furthermore, although 40% of the current Members who

⁸⁴ Senedd Cymru '[Dignity and Respect – Autumn 2025 Survey Results](#)'

responded to our survey also noted they had experienced negative behaviours contravening the Code of Conduct but offered little detail in their responses, we cannot rule out the possibility that this culture still exists. For example, current Members may not feel comfortable sharing experiences whilst still in office. Responses to the former Members survey correspond with the Senedd's own Dignity and Respect Survey 2025 findings, suggesting there remains a concerning gendered trend centred around sexism and sexual harassment.

Responses to Incidents within the Senedd

The above issues raised by Members have led us to recommend ongoing training, to be staggered and repeated throughout electoral terms, around acceptable behaviour, Codes of Conduct, building resilience, promoting equality and inclusion, and on dignity and respect.

We heard appreciation from Members for the work of the Standards Commissioner and the Standards of Conduct Committee in response to incidents, but there were also requests for swifter intervention mechanisms, such as immediate exclusions and the ability for a complainant to appeal if they judged the recommendations of the Standards of Conduct Committee to be inadequate.

There's a reporting mechanism to the Committee and the Standards Committee, if they uphold a complaint, they complained and people are found wanting, they have various things that they can do.... (female MS)

Other striking contributions in this area centred around uncertainty about who Members could turn to for advice if they had been harassed, abused, intimidated, or discriminated against by another Member or member of staff in person or on social media.

I think I'll probably go to the Llywydd with [a case of inappropriate behaviour]. I don't know that it's her role, but I think she would be able to advise me where to go with it. Outside of that I don't really know where I would go with it if it wasn't the Llywydd... (female MS)

This seems very dependent on who the Llywydd is and the Member's level of comfort in sharing issues with them, and so we wondered should the facility to gain advice be about the person or the position. The Standards of Conduct Committee has brought forward a set of recommendations to improve the process and

handling of complaints (Standards of Conduct Committee, December 2025).⁸⁵ We welcome the suggested extension of the complaint deadline, the proposal to draw on risk-based exclusion measures, incorporating external expertise (including equalities bodies), and the semi-independent advisor, who could advise on dignity and respect and the complaints process.

From our research we suggest a wider remit - a 'one stop shop' for when a member has been subjected to, or witnessed bullying or harassment, including sexual harassment. This would be an initial place to go to see a person or persons, confidentially, to talk through an incident, weigh up the seriousness, and gain support and advice.

This semi-counselling and advocacy role would help Members to think about whether immediate intervention is needed to prevent the unwanted behaviour from recurring, and take this up with the party, Llywydd, Committee Chair, Standards Commissioner or security team – whichever is appropriate. In essence, action, such as risk-based exclusion, could be taken if suitably qualified staff were available to assess and advise, prior to commencing a complaint to the Standards Commissioner. The research team has had the opportunity to comment on the Standards of Conduct Committee report and has provided this feedback.

Board Recommendations: Abuse and Harassment within the Senedd/ Standards of Conduct Committee

Recommendation: Senedd Commission services should continue to provide ongoing training (staggered and repeated) on:

- the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd and the Dignity and Respect policy;
- the conventions and rules of conducting Senedd business, including participating in Plenary and Committee, with regard to interventions, interruptions and acceptable behaviour (including the way questions are asked);
- handling of staff grievances, including in relation to sexual harassment and bullying;
- building resilience; and

⁸⁵ Standards of Conduct Committee [‘Introducing more independence and support into the complaints process in the Senedd’](#) and [the Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review response to this](#).

promoting equality and inclusion in interactions and in law-making.

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should report on the take up and effectiveness of the training to the Business Committee and Standards of Conduct Committee

Recommendation: The FFIPR Implementation Board should engage with the Standards of Conduct Committee, and its successor in the next Senedd, particularly in relation to:

- the proposal for a single point of contact for guidance, advice and practical support related to all types of harassment and abuse, (from the public and those within the Senedd) for Members, Support Staff and Commission staff;
- the proposals for a “Guardian Role”, a semi-independent advisor (similar to the NHS model) for dignity and respect; and
- the evaluation of the “Members’ Hwb” which is to be carried out by the Senedd Commission

Forms and Impacts of Violence from the Public

This Review found that Members suffer from various forms of violence and abuse from the public, taking place across two main spaces of political activity – ‘offline’ in the constituency or when carrying out other in-person Senedd business, and online, primarily on social media platforms. Each form has its own specific impacts on the Member, those close to them (family and political staff), and on democracy. These are discussed here in turn.

Offline Abuse

Forms of offline violence against politicians range from low-level to extreme physical attacks including assassinations which have made headlines in Gdansk, Poland and Kassel, Germany, and attempted assassination like that of Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico in May 2024.⁸⁶ In the UK, the murders of Labour MP Jo Cox in 2016 and Conservative MP David Amess in 2021 crystallised concerns about violence against politicians at the national level and encouraged politicians to begin speaking out.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ [Assassination of Mayor Pawel Adamowicz in Gdansk, Poland; 13th January 2019.](#)
[Assassination of Walter Lübcke in Kassel, Germany by far-right sympathiser; 2nd June 2019.](#)
[Attempted Assassination of Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico; May 2024.](#)

⁸⁷ [MP Jess Phillips in web plea ‘after 600 rape threats’ \(BBC News 2018\)](#)
[‘Sir David Amess: Welsh politicians in security talks after MP death’ \(BBC News 2021\)](#)
[‘Death threat MP says social media abuse must stop’ \(Carol Monaghan, Scottish MP speaking to BBC News 2021\)](#)
[‘Silenced and Targeted: Female MSPs speak out on the online abuse they deal with’ \(Villegas on Holyrood.com 2025\)](#)
[‘MLAs speak out over abuse suffered by Northern Ireland politicians’ \(Irish Post 2025\)](#)

Offline violence was reported by multiple current and former Members in this Review, and took a variety of forms including physical, psychological, economic (property damage), and semiotic violence (through images/ sexist language).⁸⁸

Current Members' accounts included the following specific incidents:

- property damage of offices, including graffiti and objects being thrown,
- the defacing or destruction of physical campaign materials (posters, leaflets, flyers etc.),
- in-person harassment at constituency offices and public surgeries warranting police intervention,
- home break-in attempts,
- stalking and/or long-standing harassment either in local community or at the Senedd buildings,
- and disruption of public events a Member was speaking at or attending.

Former Members also described other incidents, including long-term harassment and physical attacks:

There was one individual who would regularly sit outside the Senedd building every week with abusive messages about me and others (female former MS)

I was also physically attacked by an [elderly male] constituent [who] pulled me out of my car, screaming (female former MS)

Offline abuse is therefore an ongoing concern for Members of the Senedd and whilst some of this review's data suggest it is becoming overshadowed by online abuse (discussed later), they experienced real offline threats to their safety.

Impact of Offline Abuse on Members, Staff, and Democracy

This had direct consequences on how Members chose to carry out their political engagements, particularly in the community. Violence appears to have a deleterious effect on democracy as Members discussed implementing safety-conscious shifts in the ways that they do politics and, specifically, political engagement with constituents and the Welsh public. Multiple interviewees spoke about no longer advertising where they would be for public events or engagements, and many also now refused to hold in-person, drop-in public surgeries:

⁸⁸ Hibbs, L. (2025) '[More Visible and Vulnerable to Attacks' – Violence Against \(local\) Women Politicians and the Local Costs of Doing Politics in Wales](#). *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*. 46(4), pp.320-338

I've stopped saying where I'm going to be. You don't do things like that. You never post when you actually are somewhere. Um, I don't do out in the community advice surgeries anymore (female MS)

One Member specifically mentioned the killing of Jo Cox as a catalyst for her abandoning spontaneous public engagement with constituents.

At times, despite Senedd Members being the intended target of violence or abuse, it was also their staff who were affected. Participants discussed incidents where staff were exposed to acts meant for them as elected Members. Incidents recalled included members of the public acting aggressively towards staff in constituency offices, staff finding graffiti on walls/windows, and a Member who arranged for regular 'security sweeps' of their office following various incidents at the location, ensuring regular contact with staff because of perceived high levels of threat. Members clearly felt responsible for their staff and often discussed removing constituency offices altogether or implementing safety measures because of the impact it was having on the staff present. Members instead replaced this with more predictable or controllable ways of interacting with the public, including appointment-based surgeries or a redirection to remote engagement through phone calls and emails.

In accordance with evidence elsewhere, experiencing offline violence and perceived possible threats also curtailed Members' *personal* social activities in their constituencies or local areas.⁸⁹ This included not being involved with organising community events or on local committees, as well as curtailing socialising in or even simply walking through their own town centres.

Online abuse

Although in-person or offline violence poses immediate physical threat to Members, online abuse dominated Members' discussions. Digital spaces have become crucial, almost unavoidable places for politicians to engage with constituents and the wider public, and many feel a pressure to maintain an online presence as 'a non-negotiable' route of communication (De Rosa 2022).⁹⁰ Unfortunately, extant research explores the impact of an 'online disinhibition effect' (Suler 2004), which means that online

⁸⁹ For example, [Matthews and Haughey \(2025\)](#) found that UK MPs have made changes to habits including no longer socialising in their constituencies and James et al. (2016) found that MPs reported feeling concerned for their own physical safety, worried about going out in public, and even about being alone in their own homes.

James, D. et al. (2016) [Harassment and stalking of Members of the United Kingdom Parliament: associations and consequences](#). *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology* 27(3), pp. 309-330.

⁹⁰ De Rosa, R. (2022). [Studying Constituency Communication](#). In: Ceccarini, L., De Rosa, R., Newell, J.L. (eds),. *Constituency Communication in Changing Times*. Palgrave Macmillan.

platforms become breeding grounds for abuse and hate towards politicians as people are emboldened by assumed anonymity.⁹¹

Strikingly, almost all interviewed and surveyed current Members in this research mentioned receiving some form of abuse or harassment online, or, if not experienced personally, knew others who had. This primarily occurred on social media platforms such as ‘X’ (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, but also comments from the public in comment sections on online journalist media (including Wales Online) or radio sites (like Radio Cymru), as well as on public individuals’ blogging sites. Some members had also received abusive emails.

Forms of online violence and abuse varied from: trolling, ‘pile-on commenting’, spamming from bots, spread of misinformation including through edited videos and “*debates [which] are routinely edited for social media*” (female Member), doxxing (where home addresses were shared online), and, most seriously, death or rape threats. Some specific examples of the most serious cases included comments like:

“chop her head off”,

“execute her”,

“we know where he is, we’ll go round and chase him”,

“she needs to burn and die”.

Mirroring previous research and international concern, the abuse received online was also gendered in its frequency and its content (Salovaara 2022; Ndirangu and Waciira 2025).⁹² Male Members here recognised women Members received more abuse, and women Senedd Members discussed being attacked in gendered ways, for their appearance, through sexist comments questioning their very place in politics, and through objectification and sexualisation.

... you get all the stuff on appearance, and, you know, name calling and ‘you don’t know what you’re talking about’. So that whole dismissiveness of a woman’s intellect and ability, but then it’s obviously got an awful lot worse (female MS)

Sometimes it will be really awful things [...] saying how overweight I am or how ugly I am, or like really horrible (female MS)

⁹¹ Suler, John. (2004). “[The Online Disinhibition Effect.](#)” *Cyberpsychology & Behavior* 7 (3):321–26.

⁹² Salovaara, J. 2022. [‘Online Harassment Is Not Gender-Neutral’](#), UN Chronicle 25th January 2022; Ndirangu and Waciira, 2025. [Violence Against Women in Politics – Feminine Perspectives and Frontiers from Uganda, Kenya, & Ethiopia](#). Womankind Worldwide.

I was often objectified - I had constant comments about what I wore, if I wore the same dress more than once, these things were picked up on in blogs and such. If I went on TV shows, quite often what I said wasn't picked up on, just how I looked [...] many people who just wanted me to sit in the Senedd, be pretty and say nothing (female former MS)

This evidence therefore suggests that, as elsewhere, online violence against Senedd Members was gendered, with women receiving abuse focused on their status as women politicians, not just politicians.⁹³

Impact of Online Abuse and Violence on Members, democracy, and staff

On Members:

One of the most concerning aspects of Members' discussions of online violence was their tendency to downplay online abuse, suggesting a culture where it is characterised as an expected 'cost of doing politics'. Multiple interviewees used minimising language ('just' or 'not a lot') when discussing incidents or the frequency of abuse they received online, claimed to have not been badly targeted by online abuse or stated that others "have it worse". They would then detail how they had received death threats, threats of property damage (i.e. arson), and other serious examples of abuse. This reflects existing evidence in Welsh local politics and elsewhere that suggests politicians are becoming desensitised to the hate they receive online and see it as 'part of the job', which could later mean they do not treat it seriously enough to actively report (Hibbs 2025; Rasmussen 2025).⁹⁴

A key consequence of this process of normalisation was that Members felt they had to be resilient, develop a 'thick skin', 'keep their head down', and be able to 'let things go':

I get very little, besides which it goes over my head most of it [...] it goes over my head. But there are other colleagues who it effects and who feel it very deeply (male MS)

[...] I've had to just slightly steel myself to just be like 'oh, well, you know [...] it's just like it's now this normal thing' (female MS)

⁹³ Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 2024. [Online harassment of female parliamentarians in the Commonwealth.](#)

NATO, 2020. [Abuse of Power: Coordinated Online Harassment of Finnish Government Ministers.](#) Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications CofE

European Parliament 2025. [Violence and intimidation against politicians in the EU.](#) European Union.

⁹⁴ Rasmussen, A. (2025) [Women politicians face 'double burden' of online toxicity.](#) King's College London News Centre.

This suggests a pressure to maintain composure and ‘business as usual’ in the face of serious online violence. Although Members often diminished the abuse they received online and almost prided themselves for their resilience, it was clear that for others it had a severe detrimental impact on their mental health.

Online spaces of potential violence against politicians have no temporal boundaries (i.e. there are no opening hours within which X or Facebook operate). The constancy of online abuse meant that Members felt monitoring and blocking abuse often invaded their personal lives. This meant checking their social media whilst at home, at social events, and even before bed, something which affected their mental health:

Yeah, it makes me really frightened. [...] it's not something which I can say: "oh, it washes over me", it doesn't. I see it. It really upsets me. [...] I have to check my phone before I went to bed in case someone's put an abusive thing up, which I have to report or block - I have to do it every night (female MS)

you don't want to be going and traipsing through pages and pages of people saying very horrible things about you. You know it's no good for your own mental health (male MS)

We contend therefore that the constancy, content, and extent of the abuse received by elected Members has a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and leads to the expectation that Members should be able to ‘cope’ with abuse and violence, only reporting that which crosses over into serious threats that warrant police intervention.

On Families

Furthermore, Members were keenly aware that the effects rippled beyond them, and abuse they received online affected their partners, children, or wider families. This varied from family members being concerned about the Member and the abuse they receive, to more serious incidents of family members themselves receiving abuse. Family members were concerned and angry about threats or abusive comments received online:

[family member] will call me and say she's so angry because she's seen a comment that someone has put on something about me. [...] My [other family member] will be saying to me, "why are you on your phone?" [I tell her about the comments] and she gets really worried about me because of that (female MS)

My wife sees it - my wife panics more than I do. [...] we had somebody saying, because we are campaigning in this area, "we know where he is, we'll go round and chase him". She was panicking and she ended up getting the police involved since she was worried that they will come and get me (male MS)

One serious incident of a family member receiving abuse themselves was raised by a current female Member:

[close family member] also had a message [...] somebody basically telling her she was going to burn to death.

Others mentioned generally being worried about their family, and particularly children, either becoming targets or seeing the abuse online. Regarding children, one interviewee expressed their concern that their child could become a victim themselves, being treated differently or bullied in school for their parent's political position. This has been seen elsewhere as a possible consequence of parental involvement in politics.⁹⁵

For one former Member, the impact of abuse on her family had been the crucial factor in her decision not to stand for re-election:

I also took the decision to stand down as I was quite high profile as a politician, and I was receiving a lot of abuse [...] And I just did not want to subject myself and my family to this any longer (female former MS)

Members are therefore acutely aware of the impact their elected position can have on those close to them, which when it is extreme can lead to politicians deciding to leave politics altogether to keep their family safe.

On Political Staff

Another common situation was that Members' political staff were often those reading, monitoring, and screening social media posts and abusive email or phone communications from constituents and the wider public. Members expressed deep concern about the impact that this had on their staff:

I had my staff, I mean - I think is really important to support [staff] as well. [...] Those, those [death threats] are the sorts of things that my staff were seeing (female MS)

Of course, the other impact here is on staff and, as things stand, staff are seeing these things and sifting through them. It's not ... in their job description. It's not something they want to see or read about their boss, and it gives them anxiety, high levels of anxiety (female MS)

Members felt responsible for this, with one stating that her team did not need "to be hearing abuse" but had ended up "sharing [with police/security] images of any particular death threats that we were getting". Members felt that a solution was

⁹⁵ For example, Dr Sam Rushworth MP's teenage daughter 'rang him in tears' as a result of the abuse he received – '[Criticism is too often becoming abuse – MPs](#)' (BBC 2025)

needed to remove this responsibility from staff as discussed below regarding a social media monitoring unit.

On Democracy

As with the offline incidents, online abuse also had an impact on the ways in which Members did politics. They had similarly retreated from or limited their public engagement online, particularly on social media. At the most extreme, some had deleted accounts or ‘come off’ of social media altogether whilst others had changed their social media presence to ‘broadcast only’, removing the option for the public to directly engage with their posts through comments. Others were strict with blocking abusive commenters, had switched off notifications, reduced the amount they posted, or now only engaged with those with whom they were already ‘friends’ or mutual ‘followers’. Although this is an understandable result of the depth and extent of online abuse discussed earlier, there are concerns elsewhere that this could have a detrimental impact on democracy with politicians retreating from a key 21st century avenue for engagement and accountability.⁹⁶

Online abuse was also perceived to impact the substantive content of debates in the Siambr. Members explained that publicly speaking out on, or championing, equalities issues and policy areas was a political action which increased their likelihood of receiving abuse, particularly online. One female MS explained that there is commonly a ‘pile on’ on social media when raising equality issues. She argued that this makes people think twice about whether to speak out, something she perceived as “detering free speech in the Chamber”. These attacks were regarded as “playing a major, major part [in people’s] reluctance to say the things they would like to say [...] particularly on inequality”. Another Member had received abuse related to an equalities issue following their involvement in the launch of a particular piece of policy. This affected them and their close family members.

This echoes findings elsewhere in Ireland where specific issues around ‘immigration, women’s rights, housing/homelessness, and LGBTQ+’ politics were associated by Members with increased abuse, and by Erikson et al. who found that Swedish MPs self-censored, “avoid[ing] certain topics that are perceived as generating a great deal of online abuse” including ‘migration, integration, and gender equality’ as well as gendered sexual violence.⁹⁷ This has the potential, therefore, of restricting the substantive representation of equalities issues in Senedd debate and decision-making.

⁹⁶ Earl, B. (2023). [‘Social Media and the British MP’](#). Brunswick Review Online.

⁹⁷ Erikson, J., Håkansson, S. and Josefsson, C. (2023) [‘Three Dimensions of Gendered Online Abuse: Analyzing Swedish MPs’ Experiences of Social Media’](#). *Perspectives on Politics*, 21(3), pp. 896–912. doi:10.1017/S1537592721002048.

Siapera et al. (2024) [‘Report on the Abuse and Harassment of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Political Staff’](#). Dublin: UCD Centre for Digital Policy.

Abuse is Putting People Off Politics?

Finally, although this was not a study of prospective candidates for the Senedd, current Members raised issues around the impact of violence and abuse on the future diversity of political representation in the Senedd going into the May 2026 elections. Violence adversely affects diversity in political representation in two main ways. Firstly, as above, it depresses the political ambition of women and other underrepresented groups, discouraging prospective candidates:

it has an impact on democracy because people aren't prepared to stand up and be counted, don't actually put their name forward. And I've had those conversations because that is happening (female MS)

Women, young people, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds were all mentioned by Members as citing fears around receiving abuse and violence as the main reason they did not want to “put themselves through” becoming a politician, echoing previous research (Håkansson 2024).⁹⁸ In Wales, Electoral Reform Society Cymru (Blair and Mathias 2018) identified that violence against Welsh politicians was the key factor putting members of the public off standing for election.⁹⁹

Secondly, incumbent politicians leaving politics as a direct result of abuse and harassment is a concerning trend. Whilst we know little yet about some outgoing Members’ motivations for standing down at the May 2026 elections, we do know that former Senedd Members and politicians elsewhere have publicly cited abuse as a crucial concern.¹⁰⁰

Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Members from the Public

Clearly violence and abuse have serious consequences and, at times, warrant Members seeking further assistance. One of the key approaches for dealing with violence and abuse which passed a threshold where it could no longer be ignored or normalised was to seek advice from Senedd Security and from relevant Police forces. This was often the case for offline safety concerns and for online serious incidents like death threats.

Senedd Security provides advice and practical support to respond to incidents experienced by Members and others on the physical Senedd estate, including staff and visitors, and beyond. This includes reviews of threats to safety through security

⁹⁸ Håkansson, S. 2024. [The Gendered Representational Costs of Violence against Politicians. Perspectives on Politics.](#)

⁹⁹ Blair, J. and, Mathias, M. 2018. [‘New Voices – How Welsh politics can begin to reflect Wales’.](#) Cardiff: ERS Cymru.

¹⁰⁰ Kirsty Williams (former MS) stood down in 2021 [as a direct result of the trolling and abuse online she had received and its impact on her family](#), and many [women MPs have shared similar stories](#).

assessments, and more practical security resources, which are funded (in the main) through the Determination. These include personal alarms and cameras, as well as other security enhancements for use both within Members' constituency offices and their homes.

Positively, Senedd Security and local police forces were described by current members as overwhelmingly supportive and their support and advice were acknowledged and praised throughout the interviews:

I think the Senedd security team are superb. They really do care about members and our safety, they have always gone above and beyond for supporting gender equality and making us feel safe. [...] also my local police force in [area] was absolutely amazing in every sense of the word. They went above and beyond for me and my team (female MS)

The chief of police [and their] officers [...] were being amazing. Senedd Security were fantastic. They always have been. They've done regular sweeps of security in my home and my office. They've got a first name, you know, relationship and a really great relationship with my team. [...] I think they [Senedd Security] have pretty much nailed it. They've done really, really well (female MS)

But if I'm honest with you, I think they [Senedd Security] have pretty much nailed it. They've done really, really well (female MS).

However, it was admitted by some that knowing who to report incidents to remained somewhat unclear and that Senedd Security can often be limited in their remit:

Senedd security are great. They're very approachable, but they're very limited in what they can do (female MS)

[Senedd Security] weren't sure what they were meant to do because they tried to refer me to [area] Police [...] I don't really mind who deals with it, as long as it's dealt with and there needs to be clear process (female MS)

The appreciation of Senedd Security was often related to when things went wrong and immediate help was needed. However, this means that actions by Senedd Security were reactive, rather than proactive, only responding to incidents as and when they happened, and offering advice or other solutions or measures to help Members feel safe post-incident. Moreover, there were some instances discussed where not all Members received important security-related communications – it is therefore essential that information is received by all Members, regardless of Party Group affiliation.

At times Security services would refer Members to relevant Police forces or offer advice about safe ways to engage in constituency work, as well as practical solutions such as personal panic buttons/alarms (though usefulness of these was questioned).

Following perceived threats to safety, some Members interviewed had implemented their own personal safety measures in tandem with Security-provided resources against violence at their homes. For example, one female MS stated that they have:

full security around my house [...] I started off with the Ring doorbell, but now I have cameras and panic buttons inside my house.

In spite of this, there was a sense from Members that these provisions were not entirely reliable:

[Female MS] has used this (panic button) and nobody answered. Nothing happened. So I just look at all of these measures now and realise that actually, when it really comes down to it and you're really in danger, there really isn't very much that they can do (female MS)

Whilst the support from Senedd Security was appreciated, therefore, there was a sense from Members that a more proactive approach would be appreciated with acceptance that some situations may be beyond Senedd Security response remits.

We would recommend a review of Senedd Security processes and clearer guidance for Members on who to contact in emerging situations. As discussed in the section above on the Standards of Conduct Committee, there are currently proposals from the Standards of Conduct Committee to implement a 'Guardian Role' or semi-independent advisor, distinct from Commission staff, who would "provide confidential advice and guidance on dignity and respect issues to all those engaged with the Senedd and its Members". Notwithstanding this advisor providing support with issues within the Senedd, we anticipate that their role would further include interactions with the public both offline and online. We support this proposal and encourage those implementing this role to ensure that the Guardian works in tandem with Senedd Security and Welsh police forces to advise Members about next steps in all situations of violence, abuse, and harassment from within and outside of the Senedd itself.

Responding to Online Violence – Social Media Monitoring Unit

One of the key issues facing the Senedd regarding the problem of online abuse is its nebulous, diffuse, and often anonymous nature. A key, recent legislative change implemented to place more onus on online platforms to act in situations of abuse,

harassment, and stalking online is the Online Safety Act 2023.¹⁰¹ This Act has awarded Ofcom (the UK's online safety regulator) legal powers to hold online services accountable for the protection of UK users through ensuring measures are in place to mitigate against risks and ensure users are free from illegal harms (threats, harassment, intimate image abuse, hate, and other abuse offences). A subsequent Ofcom [report](#) in July 2025 has revealed that women politicians, especially, are receiving more constant online hate and abuse, resulting in published 'practical guidance' to technology firms on how to make 'A safer life online for women and girls'.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, the impact of the Online Safety Act is limited as, whilst the abuse politicians are receiving online is clearly distressing, in many cases it is not illegal and is therefore vulnerable to the disparities in response by the particular social media site.

The Review is aware that a 'social media monitoring pilot study' (SOSI) has been underway as agreed by the Senedd Commission in conjunction with the Women's Caucus and has recently been extended for a further six months before final evaluation. The introduction of the Senedd's SOSI pilot follows in the wake of a social media monitoring system being adopted by the Scottish Parliament, and the announcement of a slightly different system using Online Vulnerability Assessments in Westminster.¹⁰³ This suggests that there is recognition of and various efforts being made to monitor and tackle this issue across the UK at different levels of politics. The Llywydd describes the 'primary aim' of the SOSI pilot and any subsequently adopted monitoring service as looking to:

*enhance the safety and wellbeing of Members, their staff, and Senedd Commission officials by proactively identifying and addressing incidents of online harm. By leveraging advanced monitoring tools, the pilot seeks to provide timely alerts and intelligence on emerging threats, [and] abusive content.*¹⁰⁴

During data collection, Members were aware of the pilot, and the Scottish Parliament model, and discussed their perceptions of how, and whether, a social media monitoring tool will work. Views were largely positive; however, doubts were raised over whether costs could be justified given low intervention rates seen elsewhere where abusive

¹⁰¹ Gov.UK [Online Safety Act 2023: explainer](#) (updated 24th April 2025)

¹⁰² Ofcom July 2025 [report](#) on 'Experiences of online hate and abuse among women in politics' Ofcom November 2025 '[A Safer Life Online for Women and Girls: Practical Guidance for Tech Companies](#)'

¹⁰³ The Scottish Parliament's service was trialled from June 2023 to March 2024 and has now been made permanent. Costs are estimated to be circa £125,000 a year.

Westminster also recently tendered an external supplier called 'Seerist' under a £284,259 contract for an 'Open Source Software Exploitation Tool', described in the contract award notice as "an open-source exploitation tool which will monitor news media, social media and the wider internet for security risks, including threats made to MPs and Parliament" [UK Parliament Tender for Seerist Social Media Monitoring Tool - April 2025](#)

¹⁰⁴ [Llywydd's Response to Finance Committee Draft Budget Report](#)

comments failed to meet the threshold for intervention¹⁰⁵, and were also concerned about the length of time taken for court cases to be completed as a result:

*coming and going back from court - having to be in limbo [...]
technically thinking that this person who's given me these death threats or
whatever is potentially still out on the street (female MS)*

This raises an interesting point concerning Members' wellbeing in a 'state of limbo' and the worry that online abusers could become offline attackers during a lengthy court trial. Moreover, the implementation of a threshold (as per the Scottish Parliament's system) limits action - one interviewee was concerned that would-be abusers online would know that death threats are the main form of abuse where complaints are processed and upheld, and so instead would ensure their comments fell below the 'threatening' level but remained nasty and abusive and a threat to democracy.

As part of this Review, we call for a more preventative and proactive approach than that adopted in Scotland with a system which focuses on early identification of possible escalation and threat of serious incident. Notwithstanding this, it remains important to recognise that much abusive content received by Members is not, by definition, criminal and that the Senedd faces the ongoing reluctance or delayed response by social media platforms regarding intervention or regulation of online abuse. Moreover, there are constant technological innovations which bring new forms of abuse – for example, very recent concerns around AI-assisted 'deep-fake' images. We therefore encourage the Senedd Commission to continue to explore and review the best option for a social media monitoring system that will effectively address the issue of online abuse of Members from the very first day of the next Senedd, and keep pace with technological innovation and change. The Senedd Commission should also monitor and report on online abuse on a regular basis.

Given the abuse received online is not often criminal, there is a need for a Senedd specific policy to set out permitted and unacceptable behaviours from citizens in their interactions with the Senedd, Senedd Members, Members' political staff, and those related to Senedd Members on- and off-line. Albeit focused on a different level of politics, the Vale of Glamorgan County Council implemented policies on "Unacceptable Actions by Citizens" and "Social Media" in 2022.¹⁰⁶ These complement each other and "set out the Council's approach to those whose actions and behaviour against staff and councillors are considered unacceptable" and "what the Council

¹⁰⁵ This is justified as, [according to The National](#), the Scottish Parliament trial found only 461 comments out of 8122 (less than 6%) were deemed 'potentially criminal' and escalated to Scottish police forces.

¹⁰⁶ The Senedd Commission has a social media policy for its official communications channels (See Annex 1).

expects from those interacting with the organisation via social media”.¹⁰⁷ Something similar could be explored here.

In addition to these measures, the Review would recommend establishing a specific ‘taskforce’ for addressing ongoing issues around ensuring safe participation in public life. Through this taskforce, the Senedd could later play a leading role in addressing issues of safety in all sectors of political life in Wales such as local government (see Hibbs 2025)¹⁰⁸. Similar to an initiative started in Ireland¹⁰⁹, this would bring together politicians from all levels, police and Senedd Security personnel, academics, and other experts or interested parties to address and tackle ongoing issues related to abuse and harassment and to discuss how best to safeguard participation and civil discourse in public life moving forward.

Conclusion

It is clear from our data that abuse from the public was a core concern shared by participants, not only for its impact on the Member but also for those close to them including family and political staff, as well as on democracy more broadly. Members value the support currently provided by Senedd Security staff but recognise their limited remit and would appreciate a system which is more proactive and protects themselves and those close to them (namely, family and staff members) on and off-line to alleviate the deleterious impacts of often ‘horrendous’ violence and abuse.

Board Recommendations: Abuse of Members

Recommendation: That a motion is tabled in the next Senedd, by the Llywydd (or other lead member), to give directions that the Senedd Commission must address the issue of online abuse of Members, and report to the Senedd on the effectiveness of its approach on an annual basis. This must include undertaking social media monitoring and/or online vulnerability assessments, and should keep pace with technological innovations. It should encompass identifying and tackling abuse that falls below a ‘threatening’ threshold but is still abusive and a threat to democracy.

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should consider how to build upon its preventative approach to security. This would include reviewing its security provisions and protocols in correspondence with the Standards of Conduct Committee’s proposal

¹⁰⁷ Vale of Glamorgan [Unacceptable Actions by Citizens](#) and [Social Media](#) Policies

¹⁰⁸ Hibbs, L. 2025. ‘[More Visible and Vulnerable to Attacks](#)’ – [Violence Against \(local\) Women Politicians and the Local Costs of Doing Politics](#). *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 46(4).

¹⁰⁹ Ireland’s [Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life](#) was established in May 2023.

for a Guardian role. It would include ensuring clear, consistent guidance is easily available to Members to aid their understanding of processes for reporting, preventing, and responding to offline and online abuse, and violence from the public. It is also vital that communications regarding security go to all Members.

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should establish a ‘Safe Participation in Politics’ Taskforce¹¹⁰ to oversee and commission ongoing work regarding abuse and harassment of Members. The Taskforce should:

- Commission an Independent Review and Report on the Abuse and Harassment of Members of the Senedd and their political staff and ongoing monitoring and reporting on actions to address the issue of online abuse of Members, including data collected by the social media monitoring project pilot; and
- work with the Electoral Commission to assess the damage caused by violence, abuse, and harassment of politicians, to public engagement and, in turn, to democracy.
- Work with the FFIPR Implementation Board, Standards of Conduct Committee and Senedd Commission to advise on a publicly available ‘Unacceptable behaviour of Citizens Policy’ and ‘Social Media Policy’.¹¹¹ It should consider how these would be enforced, so that citizens who engage in abuse of Members face repercussions for their action

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should conduct interviews or a survey with all Members who have stood down or are not returned to the Seventh Senedd during summer 2026. This should include questions regarding their experiences of violence, abuse, and harassment, and exploring the factors which influenced their decisions not to re-stand, including any caring responsibilities.

¹¹⁰ We envision that this would be comprised of Senedd Members, Senedd Commission Staff (including Senedd Security), Political Staff, external experts, Welsh police forces, and other key actors.

¹¹¹ The Senedd Commission publishes “Social media house rules” **on the Senedd website which apply when posting to any of the social media channels for which the Senedd Commission has responsibility.**

<https://senedd.wales/help/social-media-community-guidelines/>

Equality Mainstreaming: The unfulfilled potential of the unique ‘Welsh way’

International standards

International standards for gender-sensitive parliaments set out by the IPU,¹¹² CPA,¹¹³ and OSCE¹¹⁴ suggest ways parliaments can mainstream gender considerations into all areas of work. These standards emphasise the significance of clear leadership; the establishment of equality bodies and policy mechanisms (including impact assessments); that responsibility for equality is applied horizontally across portfolios; the need for dedicated time and resource for the consideration of gender equality issues; and access to expertise (including through capacity building) and disaggregated data and analyses (See Annex 2 for a full list of Principles and Tools).

A Senedd built upon the principle of equality for all

The architects of Welsh devolution were both ambitious and insistent that Wales should establish a modern democracy that espoused good governance principles, especially in the use of evidence in decision making (Minto and Parken 2020).¹¹⁵ This ambition was in part manifested through a principled commitment to promoting *equality for all* in the founding legislation of the National Assembly for Wales (s.120, GOWA 1998).¹¹⁶ This commitment was both symbolic and substantive, and set Wales apart internationally.

Upon this statutory base has developed a unique ‘Welsh way’ of promoting equality through ‘equality mainstreaming’, the ultimate aim of which is the reduction of inequalities for the people of Wales (Parken, 2010, Parken 2022).¹¹⁷ In 2005, the Welsh

¹¹² IPU (2017) [Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments](#)

¹¹³ CPA (2020) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards And A Checklist For Parliamentary Change](#)

¹¹⁴ OSCE (2021) [Realizing Gender Equality In Parliament A Guide For Parliaments In The OSCE Region](#)

¹¹⁵ Minto, R., & Parken, A. (2021). The European Union and Regional gender equality agendas: Wales in the shadow of Brexit. *Regional Studies*, 55(9), 1550–1560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2020.1826422>

¹¹⁶ Today, there are two provisions for mainstreaming equality in the Government of Wales Act. The first places an obligation upon Ministers to promote equality in their activity (s.77, GOWA 2006). The second places a similar obligation upon the Senedd Commission (GOWA 2006 sch.2 s8[1]).

¹¹⁷ [Parken, A. 2022. Equality and Devolution in Wales: A distinct approach.](#) Project Report.[Online].Cardiff: Cardiff Business School. Available at: <https://www.genderequalitiesat50.ed.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/EQUALITY-AND-DEVOLUTION-IN-WALES-A-DISTINCT-APPROACH.pdf>.

Parken, A. (2010) A multi-strand approach to promoting equality and human rights in policymaking. *Policy and Politics*, Vol.38, Issue, 1, pp.79-89: <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557309X445690>

Government agreed a new definition for mainstreaming equality, one specifically aimed at proactive policy development to promote equality for all:

Mainstreaming equality is about the integration of respect for diversity and equality of opportunity principles, strategies and practices into the every day work of the Assembly and other public bodies. It means that equality issues should be included from the outset as an integral part of the policy-making and service delivery process and the achievement of equality should inform all aspects of the work of every individual within an organisation. The success of mainstreaming should be measured by evaluating whether inequalities have been reduced ([Cabinet Written Statement 12th January 2005, 1 EOC\(2\)03-05\(p2-annex a\)e](#))¹¹⁸

Wales's model of equality mainstreaming is proactive. It does not aim to identify and respond to the unintended consequences of policy decisions but rather to actively *promote* equality for all through policy and legislation. It requires that equality is fully considered at the start of the policy-making process, drawing upon the expertise and experience of all relevant policy actors, including people with lived experience ([Parken 2022](#)). This distinct approach to equalities – the ‘Welsh way’ – is the collaboration *between* different equality NGOs, policymakers, trades unions and think tanks to create and improve equality outcomes ([Parken 2010](#)).

There is a due regard duty placed upon the Senedd Commission relating to functions and proceedings:

“Schedule 2, 8(1) The Senedd Commission must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.”¹¹⁹

Responsibility for equality mainstreaming is borne by all Commission Services in the legislature – across both policy and functional portfolios – as opposed to falling to a single individual or team.

However, as discussed, there is no institutional requirement for Members of the Senedd to mainstream equality in Plenary debates, or through inquiry and scrutiny work in Committees.

Prearity of mainstreaming in practice: strong advocates but weak mechanisms

¹¹⁸ [Equality of Opportunity Committee EOC\(2\) 09-05\(p5\)e](#)

¹¹⁹ Government of Wales Act 2006, Schedule 2: The Senedd Commission, 8(1)

Equality mainstreaming in the Senedd relies on MSs who advocate strongly for change towards equality in a context of weak institutional supports:

There is no mechanism formally where we should absolutely check in on equality issues (female MS)

You know, we're leaving things to chance... You can't do that. It's got to change (female MS)

Instead of an institutionalised, systematic consideration of equality, it is largely up to individual MSs with a particular interest in equality to raise and promote equality issues in their oversight and scrutiny activity.

For these individuals (mostly women but also men), we heard in our research that networks of supportive actors played an important role, with the Equality and Social Justice Committee, the Women's Caucus and the Cross-Party Group on Women, all cited as important sites and networks for discussing and building capacity around equality, although the latter is focused more specifically on policy-related issues. CPGs take on the role of informal enquiry and engage collaboratively and widely. They may issue a letter to the relevant Minister following an inquiry, and the Women's CPG has been effective in this regard, but there is no requirement for a Minister to act on the information.

Notwithstanding the significance of these networks/bodies, 'success' in promoting equality issues was seen to be dependent in no small part upon the number of women MSs in a particular role/context (for instance, on a committee), who could successfully present evidence and be prepared to advocate strongly. Furthermore, without institutional checks and balances, equality issues were seen to 'evaporate' in the decision-making process. This current situation is a far cry from the internationally celebrated 'Welsh way' of promoting equality for all.

Equality and Social Justice Committee: between responsibility and vulnerability

In practical terms, a key role was attributed to the Equality and Social Justice Committee as the focal point for the Senedd's equality activity. Indeed, the Committee has surfaced and promoted equality issues through their inquiries and scrutiny activity – sometimes producing a follow-up report (e.g. on fuel poverty) – resulting in tangible and beneficial outcomes towards improving the lives of people in Wales. Inquiries conducted over the Seventh Senedd have covered child poverty, social cohesion, disability and employment, childcare, anti-racist Wales, the public health approach to preventing gender-based violence, women's experiences of the criminal justice system

and violence and abuse against migrant women (see Welsh Parliament 2025 for a list of inquiries), and most recently scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill.^{120 121}

MSs reflected that the consistency and commitment of the Committee's membership is of fundamental importance to its achievements. Not only has membership been relatively stable – allowing Members to build knowledge and expertise – but the Committee has enjoyed strong leadership and Members have invested heavily in the Committee's work, in part through committing to weekly meetings. The Equality and Social Justice Committee's 'forensic' approach was remarked upon. So too was its prioritising of engagement with people with lived experience, which has involved Members travelling beyond Cardiff and their specific constituencies. This active engagement with 'experts by experience' – a principle espoused in the Committee's work – is indeed at the heart of the Welsh approach to equality mainstreaming.

Despite these success stories, there are limitations to the current arrangements, with respect to both the status of the Equality and Social Justice Committee and whether it should, effectively, bear almost full responsibility for the Senedd's equality activity. In addition, that equalities is a reserved competence restricts the legislation that falls into the remit of the Senedd's equality scrutiny activity.

With respect to the Committee's status, remarkably, there is no requirement for the Senedd to have a stand-alone committee dedicated to equality. The only stipulation is that equality is included somewhere within the remit of one of the Senedd's committees. The result has been that, over the years, equality has moved between a standalone committee and being subsumed within a committee with a broader remit. This situation is rather surprising and sits in contrast to requirements in sister legislatures, including the Scottish Parliament.

In the First (1999-2003), Second (2003-07) and Third (2007-11) Assemblies there was a stand-alone Equality of Opportunity Committee. There were recognised benefits from an equalities perspective of having such a distinct committee, not least the access to policy-making provided to civil society actors working in the equalities space (Chaney 2008).¹²² However, equalities was then incorporated into committees with much broader remits (including local government and communities) in the Fourth (2011-16) and Fifth Assemblies (2016-21). A stand-alone committee was re-established in the Sixth Senedd through the Equalities and Social Justice Committee. There is no certainty

¹²⁰ [Completed work and Published Reports - Equality and Social Justice Committee](#)

¹²¹ The remit of the Equality and Social Justice Committee does not require it to scrutinise each Bill from an equalities perspective.

¹²² Chaney, P. (2008) 'Devolved Governance and the Substantive Representation of Women: The Second Term of the National Assembly for Wales, 2003–2007', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 61, Issue 2, pp. 272–290, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsm063>

that this approach will be maintained in the Seventh Senedd, with a potentially deleterious impact on the Senedd's equalities activity.

... so we definitely need a standing committee on equalities. We've got all the policies here. But I have to say I am nervous about what could happen. I do think equalities could really disappear (female MS)

The Equality and Social Justice Committee has developed an ambitious agenda as a champion of equality through oversight and scrutiny work. To cover this breadth of activity, the committee meets on a weekly basis.

Notably, in discharging its duties, the Committee has acted in accordance with a mainstreaming equalities approach, as opposed to positioning itself as being the guardian of equality for all Senedd activity. In this spirit, it has worked to promote its own distinct equality and social justice agenda. It has focused on the annual scrutiny of the Minister for Social Justice (who has a cross-government portfolio), as opposed to scrutinising all Cabinet Ministers; and has not undertaken scrutiny of every Senedd Bill as this would have come at the expense of advancing its own (powerful) equality and social justice agenda: *'We couldn't. We'd never have gotten anything done!'* (female, MS).

This was also the case with the Committee's scrutiny of the budget, which concentrated primarily on the portfolio of the Minister for Social Justice as opposed to the wider budget. In line with a mainstreaming approach that distributes responsibility for equality, the pervasive view from the Committee was that, *'... really it's a job of every committee to raise the equality issues'*. (female MS). There is, however, little to suggest that this view is shared by other Senedd committees.

As such, some crucial equalities activity is lost in the gap between the aspiration of the ESJ Committee and the reality of equality mainstreaming in practice: there is no systematic scrutiny of Welsh Government Ministers, equality strategies or action plans, and neither is every Senedd Bill scrutinised from an equalities perspective as a matter of course.

This is an area where we see equality mainstreaming can be institutionalised in Members' Senedd business – through Committees.

Equalities research and data: some strong research yet missing data

Senedd Members have access to high quality in-house equality expertise, with a senior researcher responsible for equality issues and spending the bulk of their time supporting the work of the Equality and Social Justice Committee. It is within

Commission Research Services that there is the most evidence of efforts to *mainstream* equality through the oversight and scrutiny work of the Senedd, partly through providing a raft of guidance documents to inform the work of Research colleagues.

Despite the availability of this equality expertise, there was agreement that the Equality and Social Justice Committee sometimes lacked the necessary equalities data.

Critique was two-fold. Firstly, while an explanatory memorandum accompanies each piece of legislation laid before the Senedd, containing a summary of the Welsh Government's Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), Members did not recall routinely seeing a full EIA in the later stages of the scrutiny process, and there were observations about the variable quality of EIAs. This minimises the opportunity for both scrutiny of the EIA itself and also access to supporting information to scrutinise the legislative proposal. With respect to the quality of the EIAs that were received by MSs, the view was that this was mixed, with their usefulness contrasted with familiar critiques about their largely being a 'tick box' exercise,¹²³ that was both 'dry' and retrospective in nature.

You know, they say, "Oh, yes, we've done sort of this assessment" and all of this – but it it's obviously ... it's not actually affecting the policy direction. So that's how I would describe it. So kind of like ... the actual influence they have on policy making and on legislation etc. just doesn't translate, you know (focus group)

Secondly, there was often a lack of detailed disaggregated equalities data. Whilst the Welsh Government has established Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units, the view was that these are not yet providing the requisite data to undertake robust analysis from an equalities perspective.

Efforts to promote shared ownership through capacity building

Moving beyond a siloed approach affords everybody a role in promoting equality. As a first step, this requires capacity building so those who are less familiar with equalities work can develop the necessary skills, expertise and confidence to pursue scrutiny and oversight activity from an equalities perspective.

Whilst much equalities training is available, it is not part of the core training available through the Members Learning team, which is the first port of call for MS training.

¹²³ Audit Wales (2022) Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise? Report of the Auditor General for Wales, September 2022:

https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Equality_impact_assessment-english_0.pdf

Instead, the provision of equalities training is itself rather siloed, with Senedd Research offering a pre-recorded session on equality-sensitive scrutiny available to staff who work with committees (but not MSs) and providing a one-off training session to the Equality and Social Justice Committee on the same topic in 2022. Beyond this, there are other examples of good practice, with guidance developed with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2013 on how to scrutinise the draft budget from an equality perspective provided to all committees on a one-off basis.

However, there are some gaps in provision, including on equality mainstreaming principles and tools for scrutiny (such as gender beneficiary assessments and gender budgeting), the social model of disability and anti-racist approaches. Developing training provision that addresses structural inequalities, as well as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practice, and persuading MSs that it can provide key insights for their work, is a necessary step. This will harness the breadth of Welsh policy competence to secure more equitable outcomes for the people of Wales.

As it stands, the lack of either compulsion or capacity amongst MSs and across committees to undertake equalities scrutiny compounds the weight borne by the Equality and Social Justice Committee and the relevant Minister to be ‘the’ locus of all equalities activity.

To engage all Committees in this work we recommend exceeding the compliance requirements of EIAs. A new mainstreaming strategy should be established for the Senedd Commission and Commission Services which encompasses all the FFIPR mainstreaming equality recommendations.

This would include innovatively embedding the Equality Mainstreaming Model (Parken, 2010) which was developed in Wales following a recommendation from the Welsh Government’s Task and Finish Group on Equality Mainstreaming (Equality of Opportunity Committee EOC(2) 07-06(p1))^{124 125}

This method for promoting equality and human rights on an intersectional basis in policymaking, brings together officials with equalities organisations, think tanks, business, trades unions, and academics in the policy area under investigation, to work, collaboratively, through evidence gathering and solution focused enquiry ([Parken, 2010](#)). We are recommending that this is trialled with Committees, who should employ this method at least once per term on a subject or inquiry area of their choice ([Parken](#)

¹²⁴ Wednesday 27 September 2006, progress report points 15 and 16.

¹²⁵ A proposed gender mainstreaming model was tested for its ability to reveal intersectional inequalities in 2010. The resulting adapted model produces collaborative intersectional enquiry at a structural level, enables the integration of equalities and human rights approaches and supports prioritisation without reductively homogenising ‘strand’ specific inequalities. Adoption of this model provides a method to embed intersectionality in policymaking/scrutiny.

[et al 2019](#)). Research has shown that this method also activates the ‘five ways of working’ towards the equality goal of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ([MacBride-Stewart and Parken, 2021](#)), facilitating involvement with diverse stakeholders through collaborative working to produce long-term preventative outputs which can be integrated across policy domains.

Conclusion

Once again, equality mainstreaming is an area where Wales has led the way internationally. The ‘unique Welsh way’ captured through Wales’s approach to mainstreaming equality has the potential to result in tangible improvements to the lives of people in Wales by reducing inequality and promoting equality. Whilst there are certainly examples of good practice in the Senedd (including the provision of equalities expertise), as it stands, the promotion of equality has become all too reliant on the work of committed individuals, sometimes drawing on wider networks. These strong advocates for equality have known success despite the lack of institutional support available.

Board Recommendations: Equality Mainstreaming

- Recommendation: Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a dedicated Equality Committee with specific remit or functions in relation to oversight of equalities. This does not displace the duty on other committees to take responsibility for mainstreaming equalities scrutiny in their work, as noted above.
- Recommendation: Senedd Committees should request that the Senedd Commission’s Research Service provide an equalities mainstreaming review of each Bill that they scrutinise
- Recommendation: Each committee should undertake one Equality Mainstreaming Model¹²⁶ engagement during a four-year term. The Senedd Commission should ensure that its Services have appropriate capacity to support the committee’s engagement with an Equality Mainstreaming Panel (including equality organisations, trades unions, think tanks, sector bodies as relevant to the policy area working with the committee on the evidence-gathering and solution-focused processes.

¹²⁶ A proposed gender mainstreaming model was tested for its ability to reveal intersectional inequalities in 2010. The resulting collaborative multi-strand model situates intersectional enquiry at a structural level, enables the integration of equalities and human rights approaches and supports prioritisation without reductively homogenising ‘strand’ specific inequalities.

- **Recommendation:** The Committee with responsibility for equalities should utilise the Senedd Commission’s Research Service to undertake, or commission through the Academic Fellowship Scheme, an Equality Mainstreaming review of the Programme for Government. This desk review would assess the potential for the Programme to ameliorate existing inequalities. The review to then be considered by the committee with responsibility for equalities, who would disseminate advice to the other committees.
- **Recommendation:** Every Committee should routinely include scrutiny of equality evidence in its inquiries. The Chair’s Forum and the Senedd Commission services should support this, by providing a toolkit including, for example: an equalities checklist for Terms of Reference, equality mainstreaming guidance, disaggregated data, internal and external equalities expertise, and witness diversity guidance/data. The Chair’s Forum should routinely review the effectiveness of the approach.
- **Recommendation:** The Senedd Commission should provide regular equalities mainstreaming scrutiny training for Members.
- **Recommendation:** The Senedd Commission ensures it has appropriate resources and budget for additional equality-related research as required.
- **Recommendation:** The Welsh Government should be required to inform the relevant committee when a Bill’s equality impact assessment is published,
- **Recommendation:** That the Welsh Government consider creating a Mainstreaming Equality Duty, as part of its suite of Welsh Specific Equality Duties, The Mainstreaming Duty would require public services in Wales to report every three years on how mainstreaming equality within their organisations has improved leadership, operational functions, policymaking for equality, the equitable delivery of public services, and meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and Welsh Specific Equality Duties.
- **Recommendation:** The committee with responsibility for equalities should seek an assessment of the Senedd’s legislative competence in relation to equality and human rights , in particular the potential to devolve responsibility for the operation and monitoring of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to the Welsh Government. The review should also consider, whether, in the event of the Equality Act ever being repealed, the Senedd would have competence to legislate to impose duties on public authorities (in comparable fashion to Welsh Ministers’ existing powers under the Equality Act 2010).

- Recommendation: Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a women’s parliamentary caucus composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda.
- Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should continue to determine that one Commissioner has responsibility for equality of opportunity in the future.
- Recommendation: The Senedd Commission to designate a Senior Commission Official to lead the Senedd Commission services’ work on equality mainstreaming [including the requirements under GOWA 2006 sch.2 s8(1) that the Senedd Commission must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people].

Support Services

An inclusive and family friendly parliament aims to deliver inclusion benefits across multiple differences. For example, hybrid working and job-sharing (see Seventh Senedd Business Proposals below), have benefits in terms of maintaining older workers' attachment to the labour market, and removing access barriers to higher paying roles for disabled people and single parents (WEN Wales, 2022).

In our research we asked Members about such enablers and barriers. Members discussed the challenges of standing for office, which included reducing hours of paid work to campaign for election and that self-funding a campaign was exclusionary for people on low-incomes.

Once elected, MSs have to set up their offices and hire staff. Members described putting all their effort into getting elected and it then being a shock to become an employer, hire staff, find an office, and go through intensive induction, when they were trying to work out the demands of the new role. This period was described as very busy and very stressful, and something that candidates wish that they had been prepared for, by their parties or the Senedd Commission, in advance.

For existing Members there were some frustrations in relation to the current rules on claiming allowances. Members' pay and allowances (which covers items such as accommodation, office leases, employing staff, travel passes and event or publicity materials) are set by the Independent Remuneration Board in a 'Determination', and administered by Commission Services. Concerns raised included accommodation allowances not covering family accommodation, family travel allowances, consistency of advice and the process for claiming for expenses. Members also discussed assistance available in relation to hiring staff, training, and induction.

After extensive consultation with Members and Chief Whips, the Independent Remuneration Board set out a new Determination for the Seventh Senedd, in July 2025.¹²⁷ As our research with Members took place between October and November 2025, Members were referring to the Determination for the Sixth Senedd in our discussions.

In our timeframe, it has not been possible to policy audit and evaluate the findings from Members of the Sixth Senedd, against the agreed changes to the Determination for the Seventh Senedd. Therefore, the research findings will be summarised and shared with

¹²⁷ <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s169249/Consultation-DraftDeterminationfortheSeventhSenedd.pdf>, <https://remunerationboard.wales/media/1pgfppko/final-summary-of-the-determination.pdf>

the Independent Remuneration Board and Senedd Commission Services, who will undertake a review of the Determination early in the Seventh Senedd.

Board Recommendation: Support Services

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission should:

- consider a summary of the evidence gathered in this review relating to Members' experiences of seeking reimbursement of costs under the Determination, their understanding of the rules, and consider how best to address the issues raised in conjunction with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
- undertake regular Member experience journeys such as those undertaken early in the Sixth Senedd, to understand Members' lived experiences, and identify areas of difficulty for Members and what might be causing these; and
- continue to ensure that claims relating to caring responsibilities are anonymised and aggregated to avoid individuals being identified and consider equalities matters when deciding on the policy relating to publication of costs.

Recommendation: The Senedd Commission services should continue to adopt a proactive approach in providing guidance and support on:

- setting up offices and hiring staff; and

the provision of reasonable adjustments in Senedd buildings, at events and at Members' offices.

Conclusion and recommendations

The research team feels privileged to have undertaken this research and assessment of the Senedd against the international standards for gender equality in parliaments. Of course, we have gone further and tried to build in equality mainstreaming methods and approaches to our work.

This included engaging with Members of the Senedd and the Senedd Commission to learn about how the life of an MS is lived, and the rules and processes that govern public office. We are grateful to them for their time, and their enthusiasm to both acknowledge, and build upon the ambitions of the Senedd to be a world-leading family friendly parliament. There is much good practice in the operation of Senedd business and in the support of the Commission, but as researchers given the job of assessment, we will always set out stretching recommendations, designed to promote equality both in representation, participation, culture and in law-making.

‘Standing for the Senedd’ while children are in primary or junior school is not currently viewed as a viable option by many Members of the Senedd who have been the main childcare provider. Since main carers are predominantly women, inequality of representation among younger women persists. Some Members, mainly women were managing elder care and alongside support for children or grandchildren. Men and women discussed their caring responsibilities and acknowledged how enabling virtual working and proxy voting innovations has been.

However, access for working class Members is inhibited by finances. Members noted a lack of diversity in relation to socio-economic status, ethnic minority, LGBTQ and disabled people, whose knowledge could produce better decision-making, and ultimately outcomes for the people of Wales, if there were wider representation.

Our recommendations are in keeping with the original vision for an inclusive Welsh democracy - for our current and future generations. To ensure their implementation, a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review Board will need to be agreed in the Seventh Senedd. This brings us to the final but perhaps most important FFIPR recommendation.

Board Recommendation: Conclusion

- Recommendation: A Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Implementation Board is established, with cross-party representation, to oversee the

implementation of the FFIPR's recommendations with immediate effect and into the Seventh Senedd.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ A majority of the Board agreed this recommendation. One Member of the Board, Peter Fox MS, did not agree this recommendation.

FFIPR Board Recommendations

Equal Representation

- The Senedd and Business Committee should ensure that any statutory review into the impact of the new electoral system as a result of Section 19 of [The Senedd Cymru \(Members and Elections\) Act 2024](#) includes an assessment of its impact on diversity and inclusion. It should also consider any imbalances that have occurred and make recommendations for how these can be addressed.
- The Welsh Government should seek an Order in Council, under s. 109 of the [Government of Wales Act 2006](#), calling for the devolution of competence in relation to legislation on measures to support diversity of electoral candidates, and laying the proposed Order under Standing Order 25. The Welsh Government should also consider any other legal routes that can be pursued in order to fulfil the Senedd's majority support in favour of statutory mechanisms to achieve gender-balance amongst electoral candidates.
- Senedd Commission services should collect demographic data across all protected characteristics of Members of the Senedd on entering the Senedd to facilitate equalities analysis of representation. This should include indicators of socio-economic status (such as parents' occupations, housing status, school attended) and intersectional analysis.
- A further Family-Friendly Inclusive Parliament Review is conducted during the Seventh Senedd, in a timeframe that provides for its scope to encompass political parties, Member's staff, Senedd Commission services staff, and public engagement.

Equal Participation

Senedd Commission services should collect data on inclusivity in Plenary debates by protected characteristic. This should include contributions, interruptions, interventions and whether requests for interventions are accepted, and whether contributions are made in person or online and in Welsh or English. An annual review of participation data should be considered by Business Committee.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ We note that in the Scottish Parliament, an exercise was previously conducted over a six-week period between April and June 2022 to capture real-time data on the number of attempted interventions, the number of interventions accepted and not accepted and the gender split of data. However, we are also conscious that technology or AI may provide solutions rather than necessarily dedicating the Senedd Commission services' staff resources to record the data.

Business Committee should consider what changes can be made to Standing Orders to improve inclusivity on Committees. This would be based on: no single sex committees; and/ or the gender balance in each committee so far as is reasonably practical, reflecting the overall gender balance of Members representatives, or the gender balance once Cabinet roles have been removed from the calculation.

The FFIPR Implementation Board should monitor any expansion in the number and size of committees in the Seventh Senedd and therefore the number of committees on which Members are expected to served. The Senedd Commission should report on the take up and effectiveness of the training to the

Business Committee and Standards of Conduct Committee. Senedd Commission services should put in place an effective means of alerting the Llywydd immediately when a Member participating virtually online requests an intervention, for example a ‘Llywydd’s button’ – similar to that used in the Scottish Parliament.

All committees should consider their evidence diversity data on an annual basis. Reports should be submitted to the Chairs’ Forum, which should continue to monitor the evidence diversity data annually.

Work-Life Balance

Based on a proposal from the Llywydd, the Senedd should affirm a parental leave policy, encompassing maternity, paternity, adoption and miscarriage leave. This would be based upon:

- discussion between political groups, and
- informed by both:
 - Business Committee considerations;
 - discussion with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
 - Senedd Commission services having identified best practice in relation to taking leave, including that in other Parliaments.

This policy would:

- encompass how the health and safety arrangements for pregnant Members are covered in relation to working in and outside of the Senedd, including any property, staff or services required in;

- provide guidance to Members in deciding appropriate leave length and other arrangements; and

encompass existing relevant procedural matters such as proxy voting – including the maximum length of time available for use of proxy voting.

- Following the agreement of this policy, Senedd Commission services should make information and guidance available on it to Members and take steps to publicise it. The Senedd Commission services should also provide for a person(s) that Members can contact for guidance on sensitive issues related to this policy. Members should also be able to seek guidance on relevant aspects of the Independent Remuneration Board’s Determination (such as the allowance for extra staff to cover work).

If a committee is established under section 7 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act, to explore the possibility of job sharing of roles in the future, it should explore the potential for a Locum Member being able to undertake the full range of a Member’s work, including Senedd business, while a Member is unavailable.

The Llywydd and Business Committee are invited to consider the introduction of a regular ‘Announcements’ agenda item at the start of each Plenary meeting which would give greater visibility to what Members’ may be experiencing in their personal lives. This is common practice in local government and provides an opportunity for condolences, congratulations, and to acknowledge other personal matters.

Business Committee should establish a procedure for Members leaving Plenary in an emergency (with a specific definition of what constitutes an emergency). In the event of a Member having to leave in an emergency, the outcome of a vote should not be dependent on whether that Member could find a pairing at short notice.

Business Committee should establish a predictable and family-friendly end time for Plenary. Deviations from this end time should be exceptional, with advance notice provided to Members if sessions are likely to run beyond this time. There should be provision for business not reached by the end of one plenary session to carry over into the next plenary session.

Business Committee should review data on plenary end times, in particular late sittings on a regular basis. Business Committee should consider it alongside the plenary participation monitoring data to enable consideration of the impact of plenary timings on participation.

- Business Committee should safeguard the option of virtual participation in Senedd Business in the next Senedd, affirming it as having the same value as in person attendance. There should be monitoring of whether the use of hybrid working impacts on women gaining promoted posts.
- The Senedd should commit to the principle of the Senedd as an accessible, inclusive and family-friendly institution.
- The Senedd Commission should commit to the principle of childcare provision in the Senedd for Members, staff and witnesses and - by at least the first year of the Seventh Senedd - have explored and developed all options. There should be a dedicated room for breastfeeding.
- Business Committee, in collaboration with political groups, should develop a definition of the role of a Chief Whip (as distinct from Business Manager). This may encompass matters such as legislative planning, parliamentary discipline and supporting the welfare of their group's Members.

Senedd Reform Proposals

- The Business Committee and Llywydd should actively involve the FFIPR Implementation Board in discussions on Seventh Senedd reform proposals to ensure that they are equality impact assessed before they are put to the Senedd for decision. This would include proposals on the planning of the business week, job share trials and other changes to the way Members do business. Any substantive changes should undergo 'scenario testing' using the lens of promoting family-friendly and inclusive working.

Abuse and Harassment within the Senedd/ Standards of Conduct Committee

Senedd Commission services should continue to provide ongoing training (staggered and repeated) on:

- the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd and the Dignity and Respect policy;
- the conventions and rules of conducting Senedd business, including participating in Plenary and Committee, with regard to interventions, interruptions and acceptable behaviour (including the way questions are asked);
- handling of staff grievances, including in relation to sexual harassment and bullying;

- building resilience; and
- promoting equality and inclusion in interactions and in law-making.

The Senedd Commission should report on the take up and effectiveness of the training to the Business Committee and Standards of Conduct Committee

The FFIPR Implementation Board should engage with the Standards of Conduct Committee, and its successor in the next Senedd, particularly in relation to:

- the proposal for a single point of contact for guidance, advice and practical support related to all types of harassment and abuse, (from the public and those within the Senedd) for Members, Support Staff and Commission staff;
- the proposals for a “Guardian Role”, a semi-independent advisor (similar to the NHS model) for dignity and respect; and
- the evaluation of the “Members’ Hwb” which is to be carried out by the Senedd Commission.

Abuse of Members

That a motion is tabled in the next Senedd, by the Llywydd (or other lead member), to give directions that the Senedd Commission must address the issue of online abuse of Members, and report to the Senedd on the effectiveness of its approach on an annual basis. This must include undertaking social media monitoring and/or online vulnerability assessments, and should keep pace with technological innovations. It should encompass identifying and tackling abuse that falls below a ‘threatening’ threshold but is still abusive and a threat to democracy.

The Senedd Commission should consider how to build upon its preventative approach to security. This would include reviewing its security provisions and protocols in correspondence with the Standards of Conduct Committee’s proposal for a Guardian role. It would include ensuring clear, consistent guidance is easily available to Members to aid their understanding of processes for reporting, preventing, and responding to offline and online abuse, and violence from the public. It is also vital that communications regarding security go to all Members.

The Senedd Commission should establish a ‘Safe Participation in Politics’ Taskforce¹³⁰ to oversee and commission ongoing work regarding abuse and harassment of Members. The Taskforce should:

- Commission an Independent Review and Report on the Abuse and Harassment of Members of the Senedd and their political staff and ongoing monitoring and reporting on actions to address the issue of online abuse of Members, including data collected by the social media monitoring project pilot; and
- work with the Electoral Commission to assess the damage caused by violence, abuse, and harassment of politicians, to public engagement and, in turn, to democracy.
- Work with the FFIPR Implementation Board, Standards of Conduct Committee and Senedd Commission to advise on a publicly available ‘Unacceptable behaviour of Citizens Policy’ and ‘Social Media Policy’.¹³¹ It should consider how these would be enforced, so that citizens who engage in abuse of Members face repercussions for their action

The Senedd Commission should conduct interviews or a survey with all Members who have stood down or are not returned to the Seventh Senedd during summer 2026. This should include questions regarding their experiences of violence, abuse, and harassment, and exploring the factors which influenced their decisions not to re-stand, including any caring responsibilities.

Equality Mainstreaming

- Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a dedicated Equality Committee with specific remit or functions in relation to oversight of equalities. This does not displace the duty on other committees to take responsibility for mainstreaming equalities scrutiny in their work, as noted above.

¹³⁰ We envision that this would be comprised of Senedd Members, Senedd Commission Staff (including Senedd Security), Political Staff, external experts, Welsh police forces, and other key actors.

¹³¹ The Senedd Commission publishes “Social media house rules” **on the Senedd website which apply when posting to any of the social media channels for which the Senedd Commission has responsibility.**

<https://senedd.wales/help/social-media-community-guidelines/>

- Senedd Committees should request that the Senedd Commission’s Research Service provide an equalities mainstreaming review of each Bill that they scrutinise
- Each committee should undertake one Equality Mainstreaming Model¹³² engagement during a four-year term. The Senedd Commission should ensure that its Services have appropriate capacity to support the committee’s engagement with an Equality Mainstreaming Panel (including equality organisations, trades unions, think tanks, sector bodies as relevant to the policy area working with the committee on the evidence-gathering and solution-focused processes.
- The Committee with responsibility for equalities should utilise the Senedd Commission’s Research Service to undertake, or commission through the Academic Fellowship Scheme, an Equality Mainstreaming review of the Programme for Government. This desk review would assess the potential for the Programme to ameliorate existing inequalities. The review to then be considered by the committee with responsibility for equalities, who would disseminate advice to the other committees.
- Every Committee should routinely include scrutiny of equality evidence in its inquiries. The Chair’s Forum and the Senedd Commission services should support this, by providing a toolkit including, for example: an equalities checklist for Terms of Reference, equality mainstreaming guidance, disaggregated data, internal and external equalities expertise, and witness diversity guidance/data. The Chair’s Forum should routinely review the effectiveness of the approach.
- The Senedd Commission should provide regular equalities mainstreaming scrutiny training for Members.
- The Senedd Commission ensures it has appropriate resources and budget for additional equality-related research as required.
- The Welsh Government should be required to inform the relevant committee when a Bill’s equality impact assessment is published,
- That the Welsh Government consider creating a Mainstreaming Equality Duty, as part of its suite of Welsh Specific Equality Duties, The Mainstreaming Duty would require public services in Wales to report every three years on how mainstreaming equality within their organisations has improved leadership,

¹³² A proposed gender mainstreaming model was tested for its ability to reveal intersectional inequalities in 2010. The resulting collaborative multi-strand model situates intersectional enquiry at a structural level, enables the integration of equalities and human rights approaches and supports prioritisation without reductively homogenising ‘strand’ specific inequalities.

operational functions, policymaking for equality, the equitable delivery of public services, and meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and Welsh Specific Equality Duties.

- The committee with responsibility for equalities should seek an assessment of the Senedd's legislative competence in relation to equality and human rights, in particular the potential to devolve responsibility for the operation and monitoring of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to the Welsh Government. The review should also consider, whether, in the event of the Equality Act ever being repealed, the Senedd would have competence to legislate to impose duties on public authorities (in comparable fashion to Welsh Ministers' existing powers under the Equality Act 2010).
- Business Committee should amend Standing Orders to mandate a women's parliamentary caucus composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda.
- The Senedd Commission should continue to determine that one Commissioner has responsibility for equality of opportunity in the future.
- The Senedd Commission to designate a Senior Commission Official to lead the Senedd Commission services' work on equality mainstreaming [including the requirements under GOWA 2006 sch.2 s8(1) that the Senedd Commission must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people].

Support Services

The Senedd Commission should:

- consider a summary of the evidence gathered in this review relating to Members' experiences of seeking reimbursement of costs under the Determination, their understanding of the rules, and consider how best to address the issues raised in conjunction with the Independent Remuneration Board; and
- undertake regular Member experience journeys such as those undertaken early in the Sixth Senedd, to understand Members' lived experiences, and identify areas of difficulty for Members and what might be causing these; and continue to ensure that claims relating to caring responsibilities are anonymised and aggregated to avoid individuals being identified and consider equalities matters when deciding on the policy relating to publication of costs.

The Senedd Commission services should continue to adopt a proactive approach in providing guidance and support on:

- setting up offices and hiring staff; and
- the provision of reasonable adjustments in Senedd buildings, at events and at Members' offices.

Conclusion

- A Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Implementation Board is established, with cross-party representation, to oversee the implementation of the FFIPR's recommendations with immediate effect and into the Seventh Senedd.¹³³

¹³³ A majority of the Board agreed this recommendation. One Member of the Board, Peter Fox MS, did not agree this recommendation.

Glossary

Equality for all: As the objective of Wales's 'Equality Mainstreaming Duty' (see below), the achievement of equality of all refers to both the elimination of inequality and the promotion of equality for all individuals regardless of personal characteristics. In realising this objective, an individual's personal characteristics would not impact upon their life chances.

Equality Impact Assessment: In accordance with the Wales specific equality duties (introduced to support Wales's activity in accordance with the 2010 Equality Act), all public bodies listed in the in the Act are required to undertake and publish Equality Impact Assessments. It should assess the likely impacts of proposed policies or policy changes from an equalities perspective. Public bodies are also required to engage with groups likely to be affected and monitor actual impacts.

Equality Mainstreaming: As adopted by the National Assembly for Wales in 2005, 'Mainstreaming equality is about the integration of respect for diversity and equality of opportunity principles, strategies and practices into the everyday work of the Assembly and other public bodies. It means that equality issues should be included from the outset as an integral part of the policy-making and service delivery process and the achievement of equality should inform all aspects of the work of every individual within an organisation. The success of mainstreaming should be measured by evaluating whether inequalities have been reduced'.

Equality Mainstreaming is at the heart of the 'unique Welsh way' to eliminate inequality and promote equality for all.

Gender: We understand gender to be the socially constructed framework that creates inequalities on the basis of sex. Differently valued roles, attributes, skills and behaviours, are stereotypically ascribed to men and women through society's structures, institutions, and cultural assumptions. In these ways, gender operates as a key axis of inequality resulting in social and economic and power inequities.

Gender Mainstreaming: As established as a norm of good governance by the Council of Europe in 1998, gender mainstreaming is a process for challenging gender inequality at a structural level. It requires that gender equality is promoted throughout every stage of decision-making and across policy areas, by the actors normally involved in decision-making, through the use of a range of policy tools and practices. The most transformative variants of gender mainstreaming insist that the voices of 'experts by experience' shape the policy agenda itself, as opposed to 'adding women in' to existing policy agendas.

'Mainstreaming Equality Duty': The colloquial term used to describe the unique approach which underpinned equality in the establishment of the National Assembly

for Wales in 1999. As per Section 120 of the 1998 Government of Wales Act, ‘*the Assembly shall make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people*’. In the 2006 Government of Wales Act responsibility for the operation of this duty was placed upon Welsh Ministers, who must report progress annually.

Inclusive Parliament: We understand an inclusive Parliament to be one which is accessible, representative and responsive to the whole of the society which it serves.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality recognises that social, economic and cultural axes of inequality do not operate in isolation but instead interact with each other in complex ways. The concept was introduced through pioneering work by Prof. Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s and has since become a core framework for the analysis of inequality. An intersectional approach underpins the ‘unique Welsh way’ of advancing equality for all as it begins with an exploration of the all inequalities in a policy field, and their interactions, as opposed to beginning enquiry from one strand of inequality and adding others.

Protected Characteristics: The Equality Act 2010 introduced nine protected characteristics: sex, race, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED): The 2010 Equality Act introduced a General Duty (section 149) which requires that listed public authorities must eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Wales Specific Equality Duties: In order to meet the requirements of the PSED, the Welsh Government introduced specific regulations in Wales: Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011). These are generally referred to as Wales’s specific equality duties. They include requirements with respect to *inter alia* assessing gathering employment data, setting equality objectives, addressing gender pay differences, monitoring policy impacts, publishing annual reports and engaging with relevant stakeholders etc. (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2025).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/public-sector/public-sector-equality-duty/public-sector-equality-duty-specific-duties>

Annex 1: Senedd and Senedd Commission policies practices and procedures and the Determination

1. This annex has been compiled by the Board secretariat, based on information provided to the Board by the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd. It provides information on matters relevant to specific issues identified in the Family Friendly Inclusive Parliament Review. It is not, and does not seek to be, a comprehensive overview of relevant Senedd or Senedd Commission policies, practices and procedures and the provisions in the Determination which are decided by the Independent Remuneration Board (“IRB”).
2. For example, while the Senedd Commission’s [Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#), [Social Media Policy](#); or [Security: visitors code of conduct](#) variously have relevance to different matters identified in the report, they are not specifically referred to, and therefore are not set out in detail here.

Committee Evidence Diversity Monitoring

3. In 2021, the Senedd’s committee chairs **recommended** that data should be collected on who engages with Senedd committees. The [2021 Stirbu review](#) into the effectiveness of Senedd committees also recommended that the diversity of committee evidence should be monitored.
4. From November 2021 until April 2022 Senedd committees ran a pilot project to monitor the diversity of committee evidence. A second pilot was run from October 2022 to May 2023. On 3 July 2023, the Chairs’ Forum considered the results of the second pilot, and agreed to roll out routine collection of this data from September 2023.
5. As a result, on behalf of Senedd Committees, Senedd Commission Services monitor a range of data including the gender balance and socioeconomic background of witnesses who engage with Committee work, as well as use of the Welsh Language in Plenary and Committees, in line with its Official Language Scheme.
6. Monitoring is based on a voluntary, anonymous survey being sent to people who, give oral evidence, submit written evidence to committee consultations, or take part in committee-commissioned informal engagement activities. The survey is sent only to people aged 16 or over, and is not sent to Welsh Government Ministers or officials.

7. Further information on Evidence Diversity Monitoring can be found at [Evidence Diversity Monitoring](#).

Induction and Training for Members

8. Members are able to access training on a wide range of matters, including the conventions of participating in Plenary and Committee as part of their early induction. This is provided by Senedd Commission staff and can be shaped according to need.
9. Consultation and collaboration have taken place through the late period of the Sixth Senedd to inform development of the training framework for the Welcome and Introduction of Members (and their staff) following the 2026 election. This included asking a specific question in the Member survey relating to training prioritisation, as well as more detailed conversations with representatives from across the Senedd, including senior Members and Chiefs of Staff. The Member Learning and Engagement team undertakes extensive engagement with Group Chiefs of Staff and representatives from the offices of Independent Members to ensure that they have an up-to-date understanding of the broad training offer available to Members and their staff and responds to needs as they emerge.
10. Commission services have engaged extensively with Chiefs of Staff from Political Groups and Members to prepare new welcome and induction training for the Seventh Senedd. As part of their induction, Senedd Commission Services, provide guidance to Members about their responsibilities as employers, and undertake extensive engagement with them as part of the induction process to support them to understand their roles as employers. The Commission provides template policies for Members to utilise on a range of matters (including parental leave) which MS may adopt as part of the template Support Staff Handbook. These are based on ACAS good practice and IRB set entitlements in the Determination.
11. An extensive welcome and introduction programme offer for the Seventh Senedd will include, amongst other things:
 - comprehensive guidance on setting up an office (with input from Commission Services, including Security).
 - office staffing structures including implementation in accordance with the new job classification framework (which is set out in the Determination).

- information on reimbursement of Members' costs for setting up offices, staffing, travel and accommodation etc and the processes for doing so;¹³⁵
- the Code of Conduct for Members and Dignity and Respect;
- participating in Plenary and committees and the Standing Orders which govern conduct in Senedd proceedings.

12. The Commission currently provides support through guides and on-demand videos that are available on the Members' Intranet, with members of teams always available to support Members with the provision of information. However, to make this process simpler for new Members in the Seventh Senedd a physical space - the 'Hwb' – is being established, where Members can seek assistance with any query without needing to know who in the organisation is the right person to approach.

13. More informally, Members' Business Services regularly offer to meet Chiefs of Staff and the Senior Advisor or Office Manager of Independent Members to seek feedback on the support provided. Officials also regularly capture informal feedback obtained through any interactions with Members and Support Staff.

Dignity and Respect

14. A formal Code of Conduct governs Member behaviour, which is separate from Standing Orders. It is the responsibility of the Standards of Conduct Committee and agreed by the Senedd. Members are able to receive regular training in relation to standards of conduct. The Code of Conduct is publicly accessible at the: [Code of Conduct and Associated Rules and Guidance for Members of the Senedd](#).

15. The Code notably includes a principle of 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”). It also contains specific rules relating to bullying and unwanted personal attacks to strengthen this principle further.

16. The Senedd's Dignity and Respect policy is accessible at [Dignity and Respect](#), and the Senedd Commission's policy at [Dignity and respect policy \(Senedd Commission\)](#). The Dignity and Respect policies explicitly extend expected behaviour and coverage to include Members, Member Support Staff, Senedd

¹³⁵ The appeal process for inadmissible claims is being removed from the Determination for the Seventh Senedd, as the process should sit with the Commission. A new claims handling and appeals framework is being finalised to clearly communicate the replacement process to Members.

Commission Services' employees, persons undertaking work experience and contractors.

Proxy voting

17. The procedures for exercising a Proxy Vote are set out under Standing Orders 12.41A-G.

18. [Guidance on the proper conduct of Senedd Business](#) is issued by the Llywydd under Standing Order 6.17, following consultation with the Business Committee. The Llywydd, in consultation with Business Committee, may revise the guidance at any time.

19. The Guidance currently provides that:

- Proxy voting is available to Members who are absent from all Senedd proceedings for reasons of childbirth, care of an infant or child as a result of a new adoption or surrogacy arrangement, or who have suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth.
- A Member must demonstrate eligibility for the scheme by notifying the Presiding Officer of their intention to take parental leave, and providing any additional documentation or forms of notification that the Presiding Officer deems appropriate.
- The scheme is not compulsory and Members are free to vote in person or use any other informal pairings available to them.
- In the event of any ambiguity, the Presiding Officer will use their discretion to determine compliance with the proxy voting scheme.
- Subject to the Presiding Officer's discretion, the maximum duration of the dispensation to vote by proxy is:
 - o seven months for the biological mother of a baby; the primary or single adopter of a baby or child; or the primary or single carer of a baby or child in a surrogacy arrangement; and
 - o seven months for the biological father or the partner of the person giving birth who has parental responsibility for the child; the second adopter of a baby or child; or the secondary carer of a baby or child in a surrogacy arrangement.

Of this, a maximum of four weeks shall be taken before the due date, adoption date or surrogacy date and a maximum of six months after the due date, adoption date or surrogacy date.

- Proxy voting is available to Members who are absent from all Senedd proceedings for reasons of long-term personal illness or injury, or due to their caring responsibilities.

- A Member must notify the Presiding Officer of their intention to take leave, and provide any additional documentation or forms of notification that the Presiding Officer deems appropriate.
- The usual duration of the dispensation to vote by proxy (on the grounds of long-term personal illness or injury, or due to their caring responsibilities) is for a minimum of four weeks and a maximum of six months, including periods when the Senedd is in recess or dissolved.
- Proxy voting is also available to Members who are absent from all Senedd proceedings for reasons of bereavement.

The Senedd Commission's Crèche Feasibility Study

20. At their meeting of 3 November 2025,¹³⁶ Senedd Commissioners considered the detail of a commissioned crèche feasibility study, its overall conclusions and recommended next steps.

21. In undertaking the study, the Senedd Commission's objective had been to establish an initial evidence base to better understand the childcare needs of Members and prospective Members, and to explore practical and proportionate options for meeting them, including the recommendation made by the Future Senedd Committee for a crèche provision.

22. The study found that childcare remained a barrier to participation in parliamentary life, especially for women and those with young children. While an on-site crèche was explored, this first-stage report found that there would be a significant risk of it being financially and operationally unviable and unlikely to meet Member needs.

23. Commissioners noted the executive summary and full report of the crèche feasibility study and agreed that, as a result of the conclusions of this feasibility study, no dedicated additional space allocation be made for on-site childcare provision within the approved Bay 32 plans at this time.

24. However, Commissioners were clear that this would not preclude pursuing on-site provision at any time. Commissioners agreed that the proposed next steps for the work should be progressed and should incorporate options relating to onsite childcare provision (from within the existing estate). That work is ongoing in line with Commissioners' views.

¹³⁶ <https://business.senedd.wales/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=258&MId=15568&Ver=4>

Members' Pay and Staffing and Business Support - overview

25. The remuneration and staffing and business support for Members of the Senedd and their staff is decided by the [Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd](#). This Board is independent of the Senedd and the Senedd Commission. It was set up in 2010.
26. The Board has responsibility for:
- providing Members of the Senedd with a level of remuneration which fairly reflects the complexity and importance of the functions which they are expected to discharge, and does not, on financial grounds, deter persons with the necessary commitment and ability from seeking election to the Senedd;
 - providing Members of the Senedd with resources which are adequate to enable them to fulfil their functions as Members;
 - ensuring probity, accountability, value for money and transparency with respect to the expenditure of public funds.
27. The Remuneration Board produces Determinations (rules) that set out the pay, pensions and costs for staffing and business support of Members of the Senedd and Members support staff, including what they are entitled to claim.
28. Any changes to the Determination must be subject to a consultation with those likely to be affected by its decision.
29. With regard to specific issues relevant to the report, for clarity all Members receive a full rate of pay throughout a Senedd term, and regardless of working patterns or absence, for example, parental leave.
30. Members may then receive additional office holder salaries (for example, as a Committee Chair).
31. Members may also make claims for expenditure for the purpose of being provided with additional support, such as:
- disabled Members or for engaging with disabled constituents (current section 3A.2);
 - Members with childcare or other caring responsibilities (current section 3A.3);
 - Members on parental leave, which includes the costs of additional staffing support (current section 3A.4);
 - Members may also claim for some travel costs of their partner and/or children between their constituency and Cardiff (current section 5.18);

- Outer Area Members who rent a property in Cardiff may be able to claim additional costs if they can demonstrate having caring responsibilities for a dependent normally resident with them in Cardiff;
- enhanced security measures at their main home (following an assessment by the Senedd Commission's Security Team); and
- Members may also apply to the Board for 'exceptional expenses' that would not otherwise be payable under the Determination.

32. The Board considers that no such Member should be unreasonably disadvantaged as a result of their specific needs or circumstances.

33. A range of key decisions have already been taken and published by the Board with regard to its [Determination for the Seventh Senedd](#). The Board reviewed the 'additional support' provisions with a view to better aligning with the social model of disability and providing flexible and responsive support for Members. Several enhancements have been made and will be introduced from the start of the Seventh Senedd:

- The amount of claimable by Members with childcare and other caring responsibilities will increase from £350 per Member to £350 per dependent (up to three), and extending eligibility to weekends and year-round use (including Recess) — an approach which remains unique among UK parliamentary legislatures.
- The amount claimable by an Outer Area Member who is renting a property and can demonstrate having caring responsibility for a dependant who is normally resident with the Member in the Cardiff Area will increase from £1,905 per Member to £3,870 per year for a Member's first dependant and up to £1,290 per year per additional dependant (up to a maximum of 2 dependants).
- travel costs for partners or dependants (up to a maximum of 12 single journeys per dependant, up to 3 dependants) travelling between the constituency and Cardiff, an increase from 12 single journeys per Member;¹³⁷

34. A Member will continue to be able to claim reimbursement for reasonable costs that arise because of disability (i.e. a health condition or impairment of a Member or a Member's staff, or to help engagement with disabled people).

¹³⁷ [final-summary-of-the-determination.pdf](#)

Annex 2: International Standards¹³⁸

International GSP standards: gender mainstreaming

International standards for gender-sensitive parliaments set out by the IPU,¹³⁹ CPA,¹⁴⁰ and OSCE¹⁴¹ suggest ways parliaments can mainstream gender considerations into all areas of work, including:

- **Leadership:** Parliamentary leaders make clear that parliament has a critical role in holding government to account on its gender equality commitments and progress
- **Establishment of parliamentary equality bodies:** This includes resources for: a dedicated committee with responsibility for reviewing government policies, legislation and budgets from a gender perspective, with strong links to civil society; a women's parliamentary caucus composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda; and a Speaker's reference group to set the parliament's gender equality direction and agenda
- **Mainstreaming:** Ensuring that all committees are tasked with considering the gender implications of the policy, legislative and budgetary matters under their consideration
- **Impact assessments:** Requiring all government policy, legislation and budgets to be assessed for their gender impact and compliance with the State's obligations under relevant international conventions, and that assessments are available to the public and submitted directly to the parliament, with potential sanctions for non-compliance
- **Debates and questions:** Allocating time in the order of business for gender-specific debates and gender-specific questioning of Ministers
- **Expertise and information:** Ensuring Members have access to a research staff and external advisors with gender expertise (from academia and civil society), and have access to intersectional, disaggregated data and gender analyses. Ensuring that committee witnesses are diverse so Members receive a full range of perspectives, and appropriate engagement methods are used for different groups
- **Training and guidance:** Providing training and guidance for all Members and staff (including men) on gender issues and how to mainstream gender into their work, and building the capacity of parliamentary staff to conduct gender-based analyses of legislation, budgets and policies.

¹³⁸ This summary prepared by Hannah Johnson, advisor to the Commission Secretariat for the FFIPR

¹³⁹ IPU (2017) [Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments](#)

¹⁴⁰ CPA (2020) [Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards And A Checklist For Parliamentary Change](#)

¹⁴¹ OSCE (2021) [Realizing Gender Equality In Parliament A Guide For Parliaments In The OSCE Region](#)







Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

www.senedd.cymru | www.senedd.wales