

# Members' Guide to Plenary

May 2021

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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.

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# Members' Guide to Plenary

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This guide outlines the main aspects of Plenary business.

It provides an outline of practice and procedure in the Siambr and supplements the relevant Standing Orders and provisions of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

It can be used to assist Members and others involved in Plenary business and should be considered alongside the following relevant guides:

- Guide to Business Committee
- Guide to Plenary Business after the May 2021 election
- Guide to Virtual and Hybrid Plenary
- Guidance on the proper conduct of Senedd Business

It covers procedure for:

- Plenary meetings
- Conduct in the Siambr
- Organisation of Plenary business
- Types of Plenary business



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# 01. Plenary Meetings

## Time and location

1. Plenary meetings usually take place in the Siambr, the Senedd's debating chamber, each Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon in weeks when the Senedd is sitting. Plenary meetings usually begin at 13:30 and are always held in public.
2. Plenary meetings are attended by all Members and provide one of the key mechanisms for Members to hold the Welsh Government and Senedd Commission to account, agree Welsh taxes, make laws for Wales, and represent their constituents.
3. The bell is usually rung 10 minutes and 5 minutes before Plenary is scheduled to start and 5 minutes before proceedings resume following any suspension.
4. Members of the public are welcome to sit in the public gallery and observe Plenary; seats can be booked up to three weeks in advance and pre-booking is advisable to guarantee a seat (e-mail [contact@senedd.wales](mailto:contact@senedd.wales) or call the Booking Line on 0300 200 6565).
5. Should circumstances dictate that conventional Plenary meetings cannot be held, the Business Committee can decide to conduct Plenary in either virtual or hybrid format. Relevant information is included in the Guide to Virtual and Hybrid Plenary.
6. It is also possible to watch all Plenary meetings live on [www.senedd.tv](http://www.senedd.tv) or via the televisions provided on the Senedd estate.

## Plenary business

7. Business taken at Plenary meetings includes:
  - motions for debate and / or decision, and any related amendments;
  - oral questions to the First Minister, Welsh Ministers and Deputy Ministers, Counsel General and Senedd Commissioners;
  - statements; and
  - legislative proceedings.

Each of these is explained in more detail in [Section 4](#) below.

## **Order of Proceedings**

**8.** The Senedd's procedures are governed by its Standing Orders. These rules take account of any relevant provisions set out in the Government of Wales Act 2006.

## **Records and Reports of Plenary proceedings**

**9.** All business in Plenary is recorded and reported in accordance with Standing Order 31. The full report of Plenary proceedings is known as 'the Record of Proceedings' or simply 'the Record'.

**10.** A draft version of the Record is published on a rolling basis and starts to appear about an hour after the start of Plenary. The Record itself is published within 24 hours of the end of the meeting. It includes a signposting tool to relevant sections of [senedd.tv](#), and can be accessed on the [Senedd website](#). The fully bilingual final version, with all contributions given in both languages, is published within five working days.

**11.** A summary of business conducted at each meeting can be found in the 'Votes and Proceedings' document, which is usually published within 30 minutes of the end of each meeting. It includes details of oral questions asked, and the results of votes on motions and amendments. A detailed 'Votes Summary' – showing how each Member voted on particular items (or whether they voted at all) – is also usually published within 30 minutes of the meeting ending.

## **ICT in the Siambr**

**12.** The Siambr is an electronic debating chamber. A dedicated computer system operates in the Siambr and all information relevant to Plenary proceedings is accessible via each Member's individual computer. Members also have full access to the rest of their ICT system in the Siambr.

**13.** In the same way, all the information required by the Presiding Officer to chair a Plenary session is provided electronically on their computer in the Siambr.

## **ICT Support in the Siambr**

**14.** Members of the ICT team are available in the Siambr 15 minutes before the start of Plenary, and for the first 10 minutes of each session to help with any issues. Technical support is available throughout the meeting should any faults develop,

or further assistance be required. Members can request support by electronic message from their computer.

### **Electronic voting**

**15.** Most voting in the Siambr takes place electronically. More information on the electronic voting system can be found in paragraphs 144–147.

### **Siambr microphones**

**16.** A static microphone is attached to each Member's desk in the Siambr. The microphones are used for recording and broadcasting Plenary, amplifying sound in the Siambr and enabling simultaneous translation.

**17.** All microphones should be left in their correct position as set by the sound engineer prior to the meeting. They should not be pushed away from the desk or forced behind the computers even if Members do not anticipate participating in a debate.

### **Siambr earpieces**

**18.** All Members are provided with earpieces which can be used to amplify the sound in the Siambr or listen to the simultaneous translation service. Individually moulded earpieces are available on request.

### **Use of audio-visual material in proceedings**

**19.** The ICT facilities in the Siambr provide Members the opportunity to use audio-visual material during proceedings, in order to enhance their speech. Members can use the screens in the Siambr to show films or electronic presentations of relevance to that particular item of business. Any materials used are subject to the usual rules of order (see section 2 for more information on rules of conduct and order in the Siambr) and must comply with the Presiding Officer's guidance on use of audio visual content which can be found in [the Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business](#).

**20.** The Presiding Officer will approve any material on a case by case basis and will rule on its admissibility.

## 02. Conduct of debate in the Siambr

**21.** The rules of conduct and debate in the Siambr are governed by Standing Order 13. The key principles are:

- Members must at all times in their conduct promote respect for the Senedd and extend respect and courtesy to other Members;
- Members must comply with any directions given by the Presiding Officer about conduct and order in Plenary meetings.

### General Principles

**22.** In addition, the following points outline general principles relating to Members' attendance at, and participation in, Plenary meetings:

- Members should give priority to attending Plenary meetings;
- Members may not bring food, drink (except for the glasses of water provided) or intrusive electronic equipment into the Siambr;
- Members may speak in proceedings only when called to do so by the Presiding Officer;
- the calling of speakers is at the discretion of the chair;
- only one Member may speak at a time;
- Members may speak in either English or Welsh;
- Members called to speak by the Presiding Officer may either stand or sit in their places and must address the chair;
- when the Presiding Officer is speaking, Members may not speak and if standing must resume their seats;
- Members wishing to speak are expected to be present in the Siambr throughout the item of business.

### Plenary Chair

**23.** Plenary meetings are chaired by the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer. They must chair impartially, in accordance with Standing Order 6.19,

ensuring that order is maintained at all times and that the rights of all Members of the Senedd are protected. The Presiding Officers will:

- ensure that business is handled on the basis of equality and fairness to all political groups and Members;
- maintain order, calling Members at their discretion whilst ensuring that the interests of all Members are treated equally;
- discipline any disorderly Members of the Senedd or members of the public, in accordance with Standing Order 13, which allows the Presiding Officer to exclude Members from Senedd proceedings if necessary;
- determine whether business is in order, responding to any points of order raised by Members of the Senedd (see paragraphs 57–60 for more information on points of order) and making determinations on any question as to whether a matter is Senedd or government business in accordance with Standing Order 11.20;
- interpret any Standing Orders relevant to proceedings, and if necessary rule on how they should be applied; and
- conduct all Plenary votes (see paragraphs 140–155 for more information on voting).

## **Temporary Chair**

**24.** In accordance with Standing Order 6.22, any Member other than a member of the Government may, at the request of the Presiding Officer or Deputy, temporarily chair the meeting. Precedent since 2007 has been for a Senedd Commissioner to chair on such occasions.

**25.** Standing Order 6.23 allows a Temporary Chair to chair consecutive items, and to 'ask the question' that a motion be voted on at the end of a debate (in accordance with Standing Orders 12.36 and 12.37). However a Temporary Chair is not able to chair 'Voting Time', rule on points of order, or allow a procedural motion to be moved. In such cases, the item would either need to be deferred to the Presiding Officer for a ruling or, if necessary, the meeting suspended until the Presiding Officer or Deputy returned to the Chamber.

## Temporary Presiding Officer

- 26.** If both the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer are unable to act for a sustained period of time (that is, for longer than would be suitable for a temporary chair to chair Plenary), the Senedd may elect a Temporary Presiding Officer in accordance with Standing Order 6.24.
- 27.** The election of a Temporary Presiding Officer usually takes place at the beginning of a Plenary meeting. If either Presiding Officer is present at the beginning of the meeting, they will chair the election. If neither is able to act, the election is chaired by the Clerk.
- 28.** Any Member elected as a Temporary Presiding Officer under Standing Order 6.24 may exercise all functions of the Presiding Officer.

## Speaking in the Siambwr

### General principles

- 29.** All Members are permitted to speak in Plenary and are called at the discretion of the Presiding Officer. Members wishing to contribute to proceedings inform the Presiding Officer in advance.
- 30.** When calling Members to speak, the chair will give regard to the balance of party representation in the Senedd.
- 31.** As a general principle, all speeches must be relevant to business, concise and avoid tedious repetition (Standing Order 13.4).
- 32.** Usually a Member may speak only once on any matter unless he/she has proposed the motion and wishes to exercise a right of reply or, with leave of the Presiding Officer, wishes to briefly explain some material point in his/her original speech (Standing Order 13.6).
- 33.** Members may speak only when called to do so by the Presiding Officer and only one Member may speak at a time. Members called to speak may either stand or sit in their places and must address the Presiding Officer rather than other Members.
- 34.** A Member may not speak when the Presiding Officer is speaking, and if they wish to speak on an item of business they must be present in the Siambwr throughout that item.

- 35.** Any Member using disorderly language will be called to order by the Presiding Officer and must follow any directions given by the Presiding Officer about their conduct. Usually the Presiding Officer will ask the Member to withdraw or rephrase the remarks considered disorderly, and apologise if appropriate.
- 36.** Members may speak in Welsh or English. Simultaneous translation services are provided for Members via their earpieces in the Siambr.
- 37.** Debates are not intended to be a series of set speeches and it is undesirable for Members to read out prepared speeches without taking account of earlier contributions. It is courteous for Members to remain to hear any comments made in response to their speech. Members should notify the chair in advance if they are unable to attend for the entire debate and should also present apologies to the Siambr.

### **Requesting to speak via email**

- 38.** Members can make their requests to speak in advance of the Plenary meeting by contacting the Chamber Secretariat team via the [Plenary Requests mailbox](#). Requests are also submitted through forms completed by the group offices. All requests are collated by the Chamber Secretariat in advance of the meeting and are available to the Presiding Officer during Plenary proceedings.

### **Requesting to speak via the Siambr messaging system**

- 39.** Members have access to an instant messaging system in the Siambr. This messaging system can be used to request to speak during proceedings. Members should clearly note in their request to speak to which particular item they wish to contribute.

### **Time limits**

- 40.** During most items of business, Members are given time limits on their contributions which are set by the Presiding Officer in accordance with Standing Order 13.5, according to the type of business, and notified to Members. The standard time limit is usually 5 minutes, or 10 minutes for Stage 3 debates. Chamber Secretariat can advise Members on how much time they will usually be allocated to speak.
- 41.** If many requests to speak are received, the Presiding Officer may reduce this time limit. This will usually be announced in advance of the item to which the

time limit relates. The Presiding Officer may direct a Member who has exceeded their time limit to stop speaking.

**42.** The Siamb clock times each speaker, turning red to indicate that the Member is out of time.

### **Language and Conduct**

**43.** In accordance with Standing Order 13.9, the Presiding Officer is to maintain order in Plenary meetings and must call to order any Member who:

- i. is engaging in conduct which would, in the opinion of the Presiding Officer, constitute a criminal offence or contempt of court;
- ii. is obstructing the business of the Senedd;
- iii. seeks to raise a matter outside the scope of the debate or motion;
- iv. is guilty of discourteous or unbecoming conduct;
- v. is using disorderly, discriminatory or offensive language or language which detracts from the dignity of the Senedd;
- vi. refuses to conform to any Standing Order or other requirement for the conduct of Members; or
- vii. disregards the authority of the chair.

**44.** The Presiding Officer will decide what constitutes disorderly language; however, racist or sexist references will be considered both discriminatory and offensive.

**45.** Members must comply with any directions given by the Presiding Officer about any conduct for which he/she has been called to order (Standing Order 13.10).

**46.** Under Standing Order 13.11, the Presiding Officer may also ask a Member to withdraw from Senedd proceedings for the remainder of the day if he/she considers the Member's conduct such as to warrant withdrawal.

**47.** If a Member does not withdraw from proceedings when the Presiding Officer asks him/her to do so, a motion to exclude the Member from Senedd proceedings may be proposed by the Presiding Officer and must be voted on

immediately. If the motion is agreed, the exclusion of the Member takes immediate effect in accordance with Standing Order 13.13.

**48.** During the period of a Member's exclusion the Member shall not be entitled to receive any salary from the Senedd and shall not be permitted to attend any Senedd proceedings (Standing Order 13.14).

**49.** Under Standing Order 12.18, in any case where the Presiding Officer thinks it appropriate to do so (including any case of grave disorder arising in Plenary meetings), he/she may adjourn proceedings without putting any proposition to the vote, or may suspend proceedings for a specified time.

### **Absolute privilege**

**50.** Under section 42(1) of the Government of Wales Act 2006, for the purposes of the law of defamation, any statement made in Senedd proceedings is absolutely privileged. Personal allegations against Members or other persons will usually be considered offensive; this includes allegations of uttering falsehoods, allegations of corrupt or unfair or illegal practices and allegations of deliberate misrepresentation.

### **Sub judice**

**51.** In accordance with Standing Order 13.15, subject to the right of the Senedd to legislate on any matter or to discuss subordinate legislation, a Member must not raise or pursue in plenary meetings any matter which relates to active proceedings (as defined by [Schedule 1 to the Contempt of Court Act 1981](#)), except to the extent permitted by the Presiding Officer. Before permitting such matters to be raised, the Presiding Officer would wish to be satisfied that:

- i. the matter is clearly related to a matter of general public importance or a ministerial decision is in question;
- ii. the matter does not relate to a case which is to be heard, or is being heard, before a criminal court or before a jury or to a case which is to be heard, or is being heard, in family proceedings; and
- iii. the Member does not, in his or her comments, create a real and substantial risk of prejudice to the proceedings of a court either generally or in respect of a particular case.

## **Relations with the Judiciary**

**52.** In accordance with Standing Order 13.16, Members must not, in Plenary meetings, make criticisms of the conduct of judges of the courts of the UK in the discharge of their judicial office.

**53.** In addition, under Standing Order 13.17, the Senedd must not discuss individual judicial appointments.

## **Members not speaking in debate**

**54.** Members who are not speaking will be expected to listen courteously to the debate and should not interrupt the Member speaking.

**55.** Any messages from officials or staff outside the Siambr should be sent electronically to the Member or passed to the Ushers within the Siambr.

## **Interventions**

**56.** In accordance with Standing Order 13.7, a Member who is speaking may give way to another Member who wishes to intervene. The purpose of interventions is to clarify any comments made by the speaking Member. Members should be aware that there is no right of intervention and it is not a matter for the Presiding Officer if the Member speaking refuses to give way.

## **Points of order**

**57.** A point of order concerning the rules of Senedd procedure can be raised by any Member at any time during Plenary proceedings. The purpose is to seek clarification from the Presiding Officer regarding the interpretation of Standing Orders and the rules of the Senedd. All points of order must be addressed to the Presiding Officer and should refer to the relevant Standing Order to which the point relates.

**58.** It is preferable for Members to provide prior notice to the Presiding Officer if they wish to raise a point of order. The Presiding Officer will rule on a point of order at his or her discretion, and may indicate that he or she will refer to the Record of Proceedings and respond orally or in writing at a later date.

**59.** Points of order should not be raised as a means of attempting to:

- raise political issues which have nothing to do with the Presiding Officer;
- extend question time; or

- intervene on an item when the Member in charge has previously refused to give way.

**60.** If a Member wishes to raise a point of order regarding another Member, notice should be given to that Member as a matter of courtesy.

### **Declarations of interest**

**61.** Detailed advice on registering and declaring Members' interests is available from the Table Office.

**62.** It is the responsibility of the individual Member to judge whether an interest relates sufficiently to a particular proceeding to require a declaration (Standing Order 2.6). Members may make oral declarations of either registrable or relevant interests – see A and B below.

#### **A. Declaring a registrable interest**

**63.** An oral declaration of a **registrable interest** must be made before taking part in any **Senedd proceedings** if both criteria below are met. That is, if both:

- i. The interest is specified in paragraph 5 of the Annex to Standing Order 2;

**AND**

- ii. A particular decision in those proceedings might result in a direct financial advantage to the Member or, to the Member's knowledge, his/her partner or any dependent child of the Member, greater than that which might accrue to the electorate generally (Standing Orders 2.6-2.7).

**64.** The general principle is that declarations need only be made if the Member:

- i. has a financial interest in the matter and will gain financial advantage **greater than that which might accrue to the electorate generally**; or
- ii. expects to have a financial interest in the future that will lead to him/her gaining financial advantage greater than that which might accrue to the electorate generally.

**65.** If a Member does deem it necessary to declare a registrable interest under Standing Order 2, the Member **should declare before he/she speaks for the first time in the relevant agenda item** but not each time they subsequently speak during the particular item of business. The declaration should be **sufficiently**

**informative** to enable the listener to understand the nature of the interest being declared.

**66.** If the Member has declared a formal interest under Standing Order 2 (whether it is necessary or not) that Member **must not vote on that item, in accordance with Standing Order 2.9.**

**67.** Importantly, participation in proceedings without complying with these requirements is a criminal offence as set out in section 36(7) Government of Wales Act 2006.

## **B. Declaring a Relevant Interest**

**68.** Standing Order 13.8A requires Members to make an oral declaration of any 'relevant interests' during Plenary proceedings. These are defined as interests which might reasonably be thought by others to influence the Member's contribution to the debate or discussion. If a Member does have a relevant interest, it will be necessary for them to declare it at an appropriate point during the contribution to which the interest relates.

**69.** A Member should also declare a relevant interest before voting, *unless*:

- i. the interest has already been declared as part of the Member's oral contribution to the debate; and/or
- ii. the interest has been registered by the Member in the Register of Members' Interests (in which case it will already be in the public domain). Please note, however, that not declaring a relevant interest on the basis that it has already been registered only applies in relation to voting (so as not to impact disproportionately on proceedings) and not to speaking.

**70.** In contrast to the requirements for declaring any registrable interest under Standing Order 2.6 and 2.7, failure to declare a future interest or a relevant interest under Standing Orders 13.8A and 17.24A is *not* a criminal offence under the 2006 Act, but, may be the subject of a complaint to the Commissioner for Standards.

**71.** If Members are in any doubt over their interests, or whether a formal declaration is required, they should refrain from participating or voting.

**72.** The Presiding Officer does not rule or advise Members on matters relating to the registration and declaration of interests. The Table Office and the Commissioner for Standards will be able to advise Members on such matters.

## 03. Organisation of Plenary Business

### Background

**73.** Business taken in Plenary meetings is scheduled by the Government and the Business Committee.

**74.** The Business Committee is chaired by the Presiding Officer and its members are the Minister responsible for Government business and a Business Manager from each of the other groups represented in the Senedd. The Committee normally meets in private each Tuesday morning to comment on proposals for the organisation of Government business, and to determine the organisation of Senedd business in Plenary for the three weeks ahead.

**75.** More information on the role and operation of the Business Committee can be found on the Senedd's [website](#).

### Categories of Plenary business

**76.** Standing Orders define two categories of Plenary business: Government business and Senedd business.

#### Government business

**77.** Government business includes:

- oral questions (other than oral questions to the Senedd Commission);
- statements by a member of the Government;
- legislation where the Member in Charge of the legislation is a member of the Government;
- any motion tabled by a member of the Government; and
- any urgent debate proposed by a member of the Government.

#### Senedd business

**78.** Senedd business includes all items of business except those outlined above. Examples include:

- motions tabled by opposition groups;
- committee reports;

- legislation where the Member in Charge of the legislation is not a member of the Government;
- Short Debates; and
- any motion tabled by a Member who is not a member of the Government.

### **Allocation of time between Government and Senedd business**

**79.** To ensure the fair allocation of Plenary time between the consideration of Government and Senedd business, Standing Order 11.17 states that, in a Senedd year, the aggregate of time allocated to them must be in the proportion of 3:2 respectively. Government business must usually be taken first.

### **The Senedd Timetable**

**80.** In accordance with Standing Order 11.9, the Business Committee publishes a timetable, for periods of no less than six months, which must include the following:

- outline of timetables of plenary meetings;
- times available for committee meetings;
- times available for meetings of political groups;
- recesses; and
- dates for questions for oral answer by the First Minister, Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and the Senedd Commission.

**81.** The timetable is published on the Senedd [website](#).

### **Business Statement and Announcement**

**82.** The Business Statement and Announcement outlines Plenary business for a three-week period. The first week contains the agreed business for the following week's Plenary meetings. The two subsequent weeks are provisional lists of business and are subject to change.

**83.** The Business Statement and Announcement is made in Plenary by the Minister responsible for Government business each week, in accordance with Standing Order 11.11. Members are permitted to ask questions on the Business Statement and Announcement. This is an opportunity for Members to request

that the Government makes a statement or holds a debate in the Siambur on a matter of concern to the Member.

## **Plenary Agenda**

**84.** A detailed listing of all items of business can be found in the [Plenary Agenda](#) prepared for each meeting. The Agenda lists all business in the order of consideration, and includes links to any documents which have been identified as relevant to the business.

**85.** The Plenary Agenda is usually published a week in advance of the meeting, and can be updated at any time up until the relevant Plenary meeting starts, or even during the meeting itself. If a change is made to a Plenary Agenda, a new version number will be allocated to the relevant Agenda before it is re-published on the Senedd website. An email alert will be sent to those who have requested to be kept up to date with changes to Plenary business.

**86.** If the Plenary Agenda changes within an hour of the beginning of a Plenary meeting (or during a Plenary meeting), Members are notified via email.

**87.** Plenary Agendas are available to all Members in the Siambur via the IT system.

## 04. Types of Plenary Business

### Motions and amendments

#### General principles

**88.** Motions are a mechanism for obtaining a decision from the Senedd, or proposing a particular course of action. Motions, if agreed, become resolutions of the Senedd.

**89.** Most motions are subject to amendment unless Standing Orders state otherwise. The purpose of an amendment may be to modify a motion to increase its acceptability to the Senedd, or to present to the Senedd a different proposition to the original motion.

**90.** The procedures for motions and amendments are set out in Standing Orders 12.19–12.28.

#### Motions

**91.** Standing Order 12.19 states that business in Plenary meetings must proceed on the basis of motions proposed, except for:

- statements;
- introduction of new Members;
- obituary tributes to former Members and others;
- oral questions (including Emergency and Topical Questions);
- urgent debates; and
- proceedings relating to the Short Debate.

**92.** In effect, this means that most items on the Plenary Agenda, with the exception of questions and statements, will normally be the subject of a motion.

#### Amendments

**93.** Standing Order 12.22 states that, except where Standing Orders provide otherwise, amendments may be proposed to motions. Amendments will usually propose that:

- certain words are removed from a motion;

- certain words within a motion are replaced with others; or
- new words are inserted or added to the motion.

**94.** In accordance with established practice, any amendments must be within the scope of the subject of the original motion.

### **Tabling motions and amendments**

**95.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.20, except where Standing Orders provide otherwise (see paragraph 120 on motions without notice), a motion may be tabled by any Member and must be tabled at least 5 working days before it is to be debated.

**96.** Likewise, except where Standing Orders state otherwise, amendments must be tabled at least three working days before the motion is debated.

**97.** The admissibility of a motion or amendment – that is, its acceptability as a piece of business – is a matter for the Presiding Officer.

**98.** Detailed information on the tabling of motions and amendments – and their admissibility – can be found in [the Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business](#).

### **Indicating support for motions and amendments**

**99.** Motions can be tabled in the name of one or more Members. In accordance with Standing Orders 12.21 and 12.22(ii), any Member can indicate their support for a motion or an amendment by adding their name to it after it has been tabled. This must be done by the end of the working day before the relevant business is due to be considered in Plenary.

### **‘Named Day’ motions and ‘No Named Day’ motions**

**100.** Although Standing Orders make no distinction between them, motions may be tabled as either ‘Named Day’ motions or ‘No Named Day’ motions. This is an established convention to distinguish agreed business (that is, business which the Business Committee has noted/agreed) from other proposed business (that is, business any Member wishes to put forward for debate or consideration but has yet to be allocated Plenary time by the Business Committee).

**101.** A motion is designated a ‘Named Day’ motion where a debate on that motion has been scheduled in the Business Statement and Announcement. A

motion where a date for debate has not yet been agreed would be designated as a 'No Named Day' motion.

**102.** Although a 'No Named Day' motion may be tabled at any time, it cannot be debated in Plenary until the normal notice period for the motion in question has expired.

## **Selection and marshalling of amendments**

**103.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.23, amendments are selected for debate in Plenary by the Presiding Officer.

### **Amendments not selected**

**104.** Whilst an amendment may be admissible when tabling, the Presiding Officer may decline to select it where he or she considers that the proper conduct of business makes it appropriate to do so (Standing Order 12.23(iii)).

**105.** When such a decision is taken, this information will be published on the Plenary Agenda and the amendment will be marked as 'not selected'. The Member who tabled the amendment will be informed of the Presiding Officer's decision and the amendment will not be debated in Plenary.

### **De-selection of amendments**

**106.** Amendments which have been selected for debate and moved in Plenary may subsequently be de-selected by the Presiding Officer. An amendment would normally be de-selected if it, once agreed, would contradict a decision which the Senedd had already made on the motion or other amendments, or lead to an illogical motion. For example, if an amendment which deletes Point 1 of a motion is agreed, any subsequent amendments to Point 1 of the motion will be de-selected.

**107.** When it is clear that a certain decision on an amendment would lead to the de-selection of another, this information is published on the Plenary Agenda. The information will be provided in the format "if amendment X is agreed, amendment Y will be deselected".

### **Marshalling amendments**

**108.** The Presiding Officer is permitted by Standing Order 12.23(ii) to determine the order in which amendments are taken in Plenary. This is referred to as 'marshalling' amendments.

**109.** The order in which amendments will be taken is noted on the Plenary Agenda.

### **Moving motions and amendments in Plenary**

**110.** When the relevant item of business is reached on the Plenary Agenda, the Presiding Officer will call the Member who is to propose – or ‘move’ – the motion. Generally, motions can be moved by any Member, subject to the following exceptions:

- general principles on the organisation of business apply – e.g. only members of the government can move motions in the name of the Welsh Government, and members of the relevant political groups will move motions tabled in the names of their political groups.
- certain Standing Orders require that particular Members move specific motions – e.g. annual budget motions can only be moved by a Welsh Minister (Standing Order 20.29).

**111.** Amendments are moved in the order in which they appear on the Plenary Agenda – that is, the order in which they have been marshalled.

**112.** Members are usually permitted to speak when moving a motion or amendment. The allocation of timings for Members to speak on various types of motions and amendments is determined by the Presiding Officer (see paragraphs 40–42 for more information on timings of debates).

### **Motions and amendments formally moved**

**113.** If Members do not wish to speak to a motion or amendment they are permitted to move it “formally”. In practice, this means that they do not speak to the motion or amendment when invited by the Presiding Officer to speak. Instead, they would usually say “formally”.

### **Motions and amendments not moved**

**114.** Members may choose not to move a motion or amendment. If they choose to do so, this should be made clear to the Siambur before speaking to the motion or amendment. Where possible, Members should inform the Presiding Officer in advance of their intention not to move a motion or amendment.

## **Withdrawing motions and amendments**

### **Withdrawing motions and amendments before they are moved**

**115.** A Member can withdraw his or her motion or amendment before it is moved by giving notice to the Table Office. A motion or amendment can be withdrawn at any point before it is moved, although there is precedent for the Table Office to be given 2 hours' notice. In practice, this means that a motion or amendment can be withdrawn during a Plenary meeting. If this happens, Members will be informed by Table Office and it will be noted on the Plenary Agenda, if time permits.

### **Withdrawing motions and amendments after they have been moved**

**116.** It is not possible to withdraw a motion or amendment which has been moved during a Plenary meeting unless all Members agree, in accordance with Standing Order 12.27. Once moved, a motion or amendment is deemed to be 'in the possession' of the Senedd and thus requires the Senedd's permission to be withdrawn.

**117.** If a Member proposes to withdraw a motion or amendment after he or she has moved it, the Presiding Officer will put the question to the Senedd that it be withdrawn. If any Member objects to the withdrawal, the motion or amendment is not withdrawn and must be put to the vote.

## **Grouping motions or amendments for debate**

**118.** Standing Order 12.24 allows the Presiding Officer to propose that motions be grouped for debate. Motions are grouped if they are sufficiently similar. Any decision taken by the Presiding Officer to propose that motions be grouped for debate will be noted on the Plenary Agenda in advance of the meeting. The same arrangements can be made to group amendments.

**119.** If the Presiding Officer proposes to group motions or amendments for debate the question will be put to the Senedd that they be grouped. If any Member objects to the grouping, the motions must be debated separately.

## **Motions without notice**

**120.** Certain types of motions may be taken without the usual 5 day notice, where stated in Standing Orders. This includes business which is listed under the category of business which may be taken without notice and which proceeds on the basis of a motion under Standing Order 12.16: elections, nominations or

appointments by the Senedd; and procedural motions. The Presiding Officer's agreement is required for any business to be taken without notice.

### **Procedural motions**

**121.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.29, procedural motions can be taken without notice and take precedence over all other business. Procedural motions include:

- the postponement (see Standing Order 12.32), extension (see Standing Order 12.34) or adjournment (see Standing Order 12.35) of an item of business;
- the closure of a debate (see Standing Order 12.33);
- the referral of a matter to a committee; or
- any other matter as the Presiding Officer deems appropriate.

**122.** The Presiding Officer is permitted by Standing Order 12.30 to allow a Member to speak briefly in favour of any procedural motion, and another Member to speak briefly against, and must then invite the Senedd to agree the motion. If there is any objection, the motion is put to the vote immediately.

### **Legislative motions and amendments**

**123.** Most legislation is considered at least once in Plenary during the course of its passage through the Senedd. Bills of the Senedd, consent motions relating to UK Parliament Bills, and subordinate legislation subject to the affirmative procedure are all considered at least once in the Siambr. Further information on the consideration of legislation by the Senedd can be found on the [Senedd website](#).

### **Motions of no confidence or removal**

#### **Welsh Ministers**

**124.** Standing Order 8.7 provides for motions of no confidence to be tabled in relation to the Welsh Ministers as a whole. If such a motion is passed then the Government must resign. Although motions of no confidence have been tabled and debated in relation to individual Ministers, these have no legal effect and the Minister in question would not have to resign if such a motion was passed.

**125.** A motion noting that the Welsh Ministers no longer enjoy the confidence of the Senedd must be tabled by at least 6 Members. If such a motion is tabled,

Standing Order 8.7 requires time to be made available as soon as possible for the motion to be debated. In any event, such a debate must take place within five working days of the motion having been tabled.

**126.** If any such motion is agreed in Plenary, all Welsh Ministers must resign in accordance with section 48(5) of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

### **Presiding Officers**

**127.** Standing Order 6.26 permits the tabling of a motion proposing the removal of a Presiding Officer or Deputy Presiding Officer from office.

**128.** A motion proposing that the Presiding Officer or Deputy Presiding Officer be removed from office must be tabled by at least 6 Members. If such a motion is tabled, Standing Order 6.26 requires time to be made available as soon as possible for the motion to be debated. In any event, such a debate must take place within five working days of the motion having been tabled.

**129.** In accordance with Standing Order 6.27, if any such motion is agreed in Plenary, the office of Presiding Officer or Deputy, as the case may be, is immediately vacant.

### **Senedd Commissioners**

**130.** Standing Order 7.8 provides that any Member may table a motion proposing that a particular Member (other than the Presiding Officer who holds his or her post as chair of the Commission by virtue of being Presiding Officer) be removed from the Senedd Commission.

**131.** The allocation of time in Plenary to debate a motion of this kind would be a matter for the Business Committee to decide.

**132.** If any such motion is agreed in Plenary, that Member is removed from the Commission with immediate effect.

### **Other Senedd appointments**

**133.** In accordance with Standing Order 10.7, where the Senedd may, under any enactment, remove from office the holder of a relevant office, that removal from office is (subject to any conditions imposed by that enactment) to be made by resolution of the Senedd in Plenary.

**134.** Under Standing Order 10.8, a motion proposing that any such office holder be removed must be tabled by at least 6 Members. If such a motion is tabled,

Standing Order 10.8 requires time to be made available as soon as possible for the motion to be debated. In any event, such a debate must take place within five working days of the motion having been tabled.

### **Motions to suspend Standing Orders**

**135.** Under Standing Order 33.6, it is possible to suspend any Standing Order (or part thereof) for a specific purpose and in respect of a particular day. Standing Orders are sometimes suspended in order to bring forward an item of business to be considered by the Senedd at short notice.

**136.** Any Member may table a motion to suspend a Standing Order (or part thereof), however it must be tabled not less than one working day before it is to be considered by the Senedd in Plenary, in accordance with Standing Order 33.8.

**137.** The Presiding Officer may permit such a motion to be proposed without notice if he or she is satisfied that to do so would not be an abuse of the Senedd's procedures or an infringement of the rights of minorities in the Senedd.

**138.** A motion to suspend Standing Orders is only valid if at least two-thirds of Members voting support it.

### **Decisions on motions and amendments - voting**

**139.** The purpose of any motion or amendment is to obtain a decision from the Senedd. This is done by voting. Standing Order 12.41 requires Members to cast their votes individually and in person but they are not obliged to vote.

#### **Voting and voting time**

**140.** Decisions (or votes) on motions and amendments may be taken immediately after they are debated or may be deferred until a designated time or particular point on the Plenary Agenda (usually referred to as 'Voting Time'). Voting Time for each Plenary meeting is agreed by Business Committee at its weekly meeting.

**141.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.36, at the end of proceedings on an item of business, the Presiding Officer must invite the Senedd to agree any question necessary to dispose of the business. If no Member objects, the business is deemed agreed by the Senedd (referred to as 'agreed on the nod'). If any Member objects, the business is deferred until Voting Time, when a recorded vote is taken electronically.

**142.** There are two exceptions to this rule:

- a. the Business Committee decides, in accordance with Standing Order 11.15(iii), that Standing Order 12.36 should not apply to the item of business. If such a decision is taken, the Business Committee will allocate a time or point during the day's Plenary business at which the relevant vote is to be taken. This will be marked on the Plenary Agenda in advance of the meeting; and
- b. in the case of a motion to pass or approve a Senedd Bill, Standing Orders require a recorded vote to be taken. This provision was added to Standing Orders in October 2017 as a result of a requirement of the Wales Act 2017 for a super-majority vote to pass or approve any Senedd Bill containing a protected subject-matter. Dis-applying Standing Order 12.36 ensures there will always be a record of whether or not any vote to pass or approve a Senedd Bill met the threshold of two-thirds of all Members of the Senedd having voted in favour.

### **The Bell**

**143.** Before a vote is taken, if at least 3 Members so request, the bell must be rung to alert Members to the fact that a vote is about to take place. In accordance with Standing Order 12.44, five minutes after the bell began ringing, the vote or votes must be taken.

### **Electronic voting**

**144.** If a vote is required, such votes are usually taken electronically and are therefore recorded individually.

**145.** At the base of the computer there is a slot for a card which identifies each Member. There are also three buttons:

- **Green:** to vote in favour
- **White:** to abstain
- **Red:** to vote against

**146.** Members are requested to vote by the Presiding Officer. Members vote by pressing the button of their choice. The results are shown on display screens in the Siambr at the end of each vote. Once the vote is closed it is not possible to change the vote cast. If Members encounter any problems with the voting system during the electronic vote, this should be drawn immediately to the attention of the Presiding Officer, before the vote is closed.

**147.** All voting results are published after the meeting in the Votes and Proceedings and the Record of Proceedings. A 'Votes Summary' is also published containing the full details of how each Member voted on each item of business.

### **Voting by show of hands**

**148.** If the electronic voting system fails for any reason, the Presiding Officer may decide, in accordance with Standing Order 12.43, to run the vote by show of hands. This is provided that no more than two Members object. Should a vote by show of hands occur, all Members in favour of the motion or amendment will be asked to raise their right hand and keep it raised until notice is given. The Clerk will count those voting in favour. All Members who are against the motion will be asked to raise their hands in the same manner next, followed by all those who wish to abstain.

### **Voting by roll call**

**149.** Alternatively, the Presiding Officer may choose to conduct the vote by roll call, in alphabetical order of all Members present. All Members will be called and asked in turn if they are in favour or against the motion or amendment, or wish to abstain. The Clerk will record the result of the vote(s).

**150.** If more than two Members object to a show of hands, then the vote would have to be taken by roll call.

### **Use of the casting vote**

**151.** In accordance with Standing Order 6.20, should a decision on a motion or amendment result in a tie, the Presiding Officer must use their casting vote.

**152.** Where there is an equality of votes, the casting vote by the Presiding Officer must be given:

- in the affirmative where further discussion of the matter before the Senedd is possible; and
- in the negative where further discussion is not possible or where there is a vote on an amendment.

### **The validity of a vote**

**153.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.46, a vote is not valid unless at least 10 Members participate. If there are fewer than 10 Members present to participate, that business must be held over and the Presiding Officer will make arrangements for the vote to be taken at another time.

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## **Restrictions on voting**

**154.** In accordance with Standing Orders 6.20 and 6.21 the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer may only vote in Plenary when:

- a casting vote is required (see paragraphs 151 – 152 for information on the use of the casting vote); and
- legislation requires a resolution or motion to be passed on a vote in which the number of Members voting in favour is not less than two-thirds of the total number of Senedd seats (that is, 40 out of 60 Members).

**155.** In accordance with Standing Order 2.9, any Member who is required to declare a formal financial interest in a matter before taking part in any Senedd proceedings (in accordance with Standing Order 2.6) must not vote on any item of business which relates to that matter.

## **Debates**

**156.** Debates are one of the most frequent items of business on the Plenary Agenda and proceed on the basis of motions and amendments (see paragraphs 88 – 94 on motions and amendments).

## **Types of debate**

**157.** Many types of debate are brought forward in Plenary, including:

- Government debates;
- opposition group debates on a topic of their choice;
- committee debates relating to a report published by the committee;
- debates proposed by individual Members other than members of the Government; and
- legislative debates.

## **Timing and structures of debates**

**158.** Other than in the case of Government debates, the time allocated for all other types of debates and their frequency are determined by the Business Committee.

**159.** Other than Government debates, the subject of debates are not included in the Business Statement and Announcement, but are published a week beforehand when the relevant motion is tabled.

**160.** A typical debate begins with a Member moving the motion and introducing the topic. Who moves the motion depends on the type of debate. For example, a Welsh Minister introduces a Government debate and the Chair of the committee introduces a debate on a committee report.

**161.** If a Member has tabled an amendment to the motion, they are invited to move their amendment and explain why they are asking the Senedd to amend the original motion. The Presiding Officer will then call other Members who have requested to speak on the topic.

**162.** In practice, most motions and amendments are tabled in advance by the Business Managers of each political group, but are often moved in the Siambr by the group member who has responsibility for the policy portfolio that the motion or amendment relates to.

**163.** In debates other than government debates, the Minister may participate, and usually responds as the penultimate speaker to the points raised by Members. Finally, the Member who introduced the debate makes their closing remarks to the Senedd.

**164.** At the end of a debate, the Presiding Officer asks the Senedd to agree the motion. If any Member objects, the motion must be put to the vote. Members may be asked to vote immediately, or may be asked to do so at a designated 'Voting Time' (see paragraphs 139-142 for more information on decisions on motions and amendments).

## **Member debates**

**165.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.20, any Member may table motions for debate. Member debates proceed on the basis of motions, like all other debates.

**166.** There are two main mechanisms set out in Standing Orders by which these debates can be brought forward. Any Member who is not a member of the Government may table a 'No Named Day' motion and encourage other individual Members to add their names in support in accordance with Standing Order 12.21. The Business Committee would then decide whether to allocate time for the motion to be debated. Alternatively, in accordance with Standing Order 12.28, the

Presiding Officer can hold a ballot to determine the name of Member(s) who may be allocated time for a motion in their name to be debated.

**167.** Since the Fourth Assembly, to encourage motions from Members the Business Committee has usually scheduled a Member Debate every half term and invited Members to table a motion for debate. To be eligible for consideration, a motion has to be tabled or supported by at least three Members representing two different groups. The Business Committee then selects one motion for debate from amongst the eligible ones tabled.

## **Short Debates**

**168.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.72, Short Debates differ from other debates as they proceed on the basis of a topic as opposed to a tabled motion. As such, they do not require a decision by the Senedd in the form of a vote.

**169.** Any Member, other than a member of the Government, is selected from a ballot held by the Presiding Officer and may then put forward a topic of interest or a constituency matter for general debate. The Table Office must be notified of the chosen topic not later than five working days before it is debated. More information about Short Debates can be found in [the Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business](#).

### **Structure of the Short Debate**

**170.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.74, the Member who succeeded in the ballot will open the debate and speak for their allocated time.

**171.** The Member may permit other colleagues to contribute within this allocation of time for a maximum of 1 minute each. If the Member intends to allow others to contribute, he or she should announce this at the beginning of the debate and is responsible for ensuring that enough time within the total 15 minute allocation is left for the contributing Member(s). No other Member may speak or intervene during the first 15 minutes of the debate unless they have the permission of the Member who succeeded in the ballot.

**172.** Standing Order 12.74(ii) states that a Minister (or a Commissioner if the matter falls within the responsibilities of the Senedd Commission) may respond. There is no requirement for the Welsh Government (or the Senedd Commission) to reply, however it is common practice for them to do so.

**173.** The responding Minister (or Commissioner) is allocated a total time of 15 minutes. In accordance with established practice, any Member may seek an

intervention during the response (for more information on interventions, see paragraph 56).

## **Legislative Debates**

**174.** The Senedd may make laws, known as Acts of Senedd Cymru. Proposed Acts are known as Bills; and a Bill becomes an Act when it has been passed by the Senedd in Plenary and received Royal Assent.

**175.** There is generally a four-stage process for the consideration of a Bill involving:

- Stage 1 – consideration of the general principles of the Bill by a committee. The committee typically asks stakeholders what they think the Bill should do, holds meetings to discuss the Bill with experts and members of the public, and produces a report of their findings. All 60 Members then debate the general principles of the Bill in Plenary, and vote on whether they agree with its general principles (if they do not, the Bill does not progress any further);
- Stage 2 – detailed committee consideration of the Bill and any amendments tabled to that Bill;
- Stage 3 – detailed consideration, by the Senedd in Plenary, of the Bill and any amendments tabled to that Bill;
- Stage 4 – a vote by the Senedd in Plenary to pass the final text of the Bill.

**176.** Standing Order 26 also provides for an additional amending stage, called the Report stage, which may take place between stages 3 and 4, if proposed by the Minister or Member in Charge and agreed by the Senedd.

**177.** The timetable for the committee stages of the Bill's consideration is agreed by the Business Committee.

### **Structure of a Stage 1 debate**

**178.** The Minister or Member in Charge will open the debate and speak for their allocated time.

**179.** The Chair of the responsible committee will always speak during a Stage 1 debate on a Bill. The speech will usually summarise the committee's final report on the Bill and highlight key findings and recommendations.

**180.** The Chairs of the Finance Committee and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee may also request to speak if they have reported on the Bill.

**181.** Amendments may be tabled to a motion to agree the general principles of a Bill. However the Presiding Officer has indicated that amendments will only be selected for debate if they are worded so that, if the motion as amended were agreed to, it would not cast any doubt on whether the Senedd had agreed to the general principles of the Bill. Time is given for movers of amendments to speak, followed by contributions from any other backbench Member.

**182.** The Minister or Member in Charge will close the debate and speak for the remainder of their allocated time.

### **Structure of a Stage 3/Report Stage debate**

**183.** Stage 3 proceedings consist of the moving and disposal of those amendments selected for debate. The debate follows the order of the Groupings list, while votes on amendments are taken in the order the amendments appear on the Marshalled list.

**184.** For each group of amendments the debate takes the following form:

- Presiding Officer calls the proposer of the lead amendment (the first in the group) to move their amendment and speak to it and the other amendments in the group;
- Presiding Officer invites proposers of other amendments in the group to speak to their amendment and the others in the group – N.B. these amendments are not moved at this Stage, but will be called when the time comes to vote on them;
- Presiding Officer invites other Members to speak on the amendments in the group;
- Presiding Officer invites the Minister or Member in Charge of the legislation to comment;
- Presiding Officer invites the proposer of the lead amendment to respond to the debate.

**185.** The Presiding Officer will then 'put the question' that the lead amendment be agreed. If no Member objects the amendment is agreed to. If any Member does object the Presiding Officer will call an immediate electronic vote.

**186.** Once a group of amendments has been debated and the lead amendment agreed or not agreed, the Presiding Officer will move onto the next amendment in the Marshalled List. This could either be the lead amendment in the next group of amendments, or an amendment that has already been debated in a previous group.

#### **Stage 4 - Final Stage**

**187.** Standing Order 26.47 allows any Member to table a motion that a Bill be passed, but prevents it from being considered at least five working days after the completion of Stage 3. This is intended to be the normal mechanism for the Senedd to agree that a Bill be passed, though there is also the option of moving without notice under Standing Order 26.48.

#### **Royal Assent**

**188.** Preparation for Royal Assent will begin on the completion of Stage 4 in the Senedd when the Senedd approves the Bill in its final form.

**189.** A Bill receives Royal Assent when 'Letters Patent under the Welsh Seal signed with Her Majesty's own hand signifying Her Assent' are notified to the Clerk.

**190.** Upon a Bill receiving Royal Assent, the Presiding Officer will make an announcement to that effect during Plenary at the next available opportunity.

### **Oral questions**

#### **Background**

**191.** Members may table questions for oral answer in Plenary to the First Minister, Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and the Senedd Commission about any matter falling within their areas of responsibility. Oral questions are answered during a designated question time in Plenary.

**192.** Questions and answers are published in the Senedd's official Record of Proceedings. Oral questions are one of the most important ways in which Members can hold the Welsh Government and Senedd Commission to account.

### **Timetable for oral questions**

**193.** In accordance with Standing Orders the First Minister answers questions each week, whilst Welsh Ministers and the Counsel General answer questions on a four week rotation. Questions to the Senedd Commission also take place once every four weeks, in accordance with the Senedd timetable. The schedule for oral questions is published on the [Senedd website](#).

**194.** If the First Minister, Welsh Minister or Counsel General is unable to answer oral questions on a day when he or she would normally do so, Standing Orders permit another Welsh Minister to answer those questions.

### **Tabling oral questions**

**195.** The Presiding Officer conducts a ballot to determine the names of Members who may table questions for a designated Question Time. Each Member may enter their name into the ballot once for the First Minister and other Ministers. Group Leaders cannot enter the ballot for questions to the First Minister as there is a dedicated time set aside for Group Leaders to ask questions without notice to the First Minister, normally after the second tabled question has been asked.

**196.** The Member selected must then table his or her oral question at least five working days before the question is due to be answered for Welsh Ministers, the Counsel General and Senedd Commission. A shorter deadline of three working days applies for questions to the First Minister. Questions must relate to the responsibilities of the Minister concerned. The order in which the questions are to be asked in Plenary are selected by random means and they are published on the [Senedd website](#). More information about tabling questions can be found in [the Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business](#).

**197.** There is no ballot for questions to the Senedd Commission and the Counsel General (in his capacity as 'law officer'); any Member wishing to table a question may do so.

### **Question time proceedings in Plenary**

**198.** During Question Time the relevant Member is called to ask their tabled question in the order listed on the Plenary Agenda. The Member will read out the text of their question and will be provided with an oral answer from the Minister or Commissioner.

## Timing for questions

**199.** The indicative time allocated for oral questions will appear on the Business Statement and Announcement. However, Standing Order 12.56 sets out the following maximum times:

- the First Minister answers oral questions for a maximum of 60 minutes (since 19 February 2013, the Government has allocated 45 minutes to Questions to the First Minister);
- the Welsh Ministers and Counsel General answer oral questions for a maximum of 45 minutes;
- the Senedd Commission answers oral questions for a maximum of 30 minutes.

**200.** By convention, individual oral questions are allocated four minutes each. This is an indicative timing and, depending on the number of Members requesting to ask supplementary questions, may be allowed to run beyond 4 minutes at the Presiding Officer's discretion.

## Supplementary questions

**201.** Once the Minister (or Commissioner) has replied, the Presiding Officer must call the Member to ask one other question which is related to their tabled question.

**202.** Other Members may also be called to ask a related supplementary question, i.e. a question on the same subject as the original question, at the Presiding Officer's discretion. The Minister replies to each supplementary question in turn.

**203.** Since the Fourth Assembly, separate arrangements have been in place for leaders' questions and Spokespeople's questions – see below.

## Leaders' questions

**204.** There is a dedicated time for leaders' questions after the second tabled question to the First Minister is answered each week. Leaders of opposition groups may be permitted to ask one question to the First Minister, followed by two supplementaries. No other Member may ask a supplementary question during this time.

## **Spokespeople's questions**

**205.** During Ministerial question time, group spokespeople may be given an opportunity to ask 'spokespeople's questions' after the second tabled question, again on a rota basis. Opposition group spokesperson may be called to ask one question to a portfolio Minister (or Deputy Minister) followed by two additional supplementary questions. No other Members are permitted to ask supplementary questions during spokespeople's questions.

## **Topical Questions**

**206.** Since May 2017, time has been allocated for Members to ask Topical Questions without notice to Welsh Ministers, as the first item of business after Oral Questions every Wednesday (Standing Orders 12.68A – 12.68B). This procedure was introduced alongside changes to the criteria for submission of emergency oral questions (see paragraphs 234–240 below for more on emergency questions). Topical Questions must relate to a matter of national, regional or local significance where an expedited Ministerial response is desirable. The question must also have arisen since the deadline for tabling Topical Questions the previous week: Topical Questions must be tabled with the Table Office between 09:00 on Monday and 10:00 on Wednesday. More guidance on Topical Questions can be found in [the Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business](#).

## **Grouped questions**

**207.** When two or more tabled questions are similar the Presiding Officer may allow those questions to be grouped together for answer. It is a matter for the Minister or Commissioner answering the questions to make this request to the Presiding Officer. In accordance with custom and practice, a grouping request is made prior to a Plenary meeting.

**208.** If the Presiding Officer allows the questions to be grouped, Chamber Secretariat officials will inform Members who tabled the relevant questions, their support staff and group manager in advance of the Plenary meeting.

**209.** The Presiding Officer will call the Member to ask the first question of the grouping. This is the question which appears first on the Plenary Agenda. The Minister or Commissioner will normally reply by noting that the Presiding Officer has given his or her permission to group the question for answer and proceeds to give a response. The Member who tabled the first question of the grouping will then be invited to ask his or her supplementary. Other tabled questions which have been grouped for answer are not read aloud but the Members who tabled them are called to ask their supplementary questions subsequently.

**210.** When two or more questions have been grouped, the time allocated for each question will be added together.

### **Closed questions**

**211.** Closed questions are questions which refer to a specific area or region of Wales. The Presiding Officer will normally only call other Members who represent the constituency or region mentioned in the question to ask supplementary questions.

**212.** By convention, group leaders or spokespersons may be called to ask supplementary questions on closed questions, even if they do not represent the region or constituency in question. They are expected, however, to ensure that their supplementaries relate directly, in geographic terms, to the tabled question.

### **Answers to questions**

**213.** The answer given by a Minister or Commissioner to any tabled question or supplementary question is a matter for them. The Presiding Officer will not normally rule on their content.

**214.** Although questions cannot be tabled to Deputy Ministers, they may answer questions on behalf of a Minister on any matter on which they assist, in accordance with Standing Order 12.57. In line with previous rulings, arrangements for allocating responsibilities for answering questions to a Deputy Minister are a matter for the Welsh Government, not the Presiding Officer.

### **Withdrawing questions or converting them for written answer**

**215.** Questions originally tabled for oral answer may be withdrawn by the tabling Member at any time before the start of the Plenary meeting in which they are due to be answered by contacting the Table Office. Detailed information on the withdrawing or conversion of oral questions can be found in [the Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business](#).

### **Questions not asked**

**216.** If a tabled question was not withdrawn before the relevant Plenary meeting, but is not asked for any reason, it becomes a question 'not asked'. The Government may nonetheless provide a written answer to such questions, which are then published alongside the [Record of Proceedings](#).

## Questions not reached

**217.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.66, where any tabled oral question is not reached, the Member must receive a written answer on the same day. The written answer is published in the [Record of Proceedings](#).

## Written Questions

**218.** In accordance with Standing Order 14.1, Members can also table questions specifically for written answer. There is no limit on the number of written questions a Member can table. It is convention that the Government will provide an answer within 5 working days, and all written answers are published in a daily bulletin alongside the [Record of Proceedings](#). Written questions do not form any part of Plenary proceedings.

## Oral statements

### Types of oral statement

**219.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.50, oral statements may be made by the following individuals:

- the Presiding Officer;
- a member of the Welsh Government;
- a member of the Commission about any matter coming within the responsibilities of the Commission; and
- any other Member, where the subject matter of the statement relates to a function of the Senedd for which they are responsible, with the agreement of the Presiding Officer (this could include, for example, an introductory statement on a piece of Member proposed legislation by the Member in Charge of that legislation, and '90 second statements' by individual Members, for which time is made available every Wednesday).

**220.** The Business Statement and Announcement is another specific type of oral statement. For detailed information about this, see paragraphs 82–83.

### Notice of oral statements

**221.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.16, statements by the Presiding Officer, a member of the Welsh Government or the Senedd Commission can be made without notice. In practice, this means that they can be added to the Plenary Agenda at any point. This contrasts to the notice required for debates or decisions

on motions which require five days' notice (unless the relevant Standing Order is suspended – see paragraphs 135–138 for information on the suspension of Standing Orders).

### **Timing and length of oral statements**

**222.** Statements are usually allocated a maximum time on the Plenary Agenda. However, it has become usual practice for statements not to exceed 1000 words or 10 minutes in order to allow sufficient time for Members to question the Member delivering the statement.

### **Questions on oral statements**

**223.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.51, the Presiding Officer may permit questions to be asked of a Member making a statement.

**224.** Group spokespeople will normally be called first to ask questions, followed by any other Member who has indicated a desire to speak. Members are called at the Presiding Officer's discretion.

**225.** Accepted practice has developed whereby group spokespeople are permitted to give a short preamble before their questions are asked. Other speakers should ask a maximum of two questions and those questions should be succinct.

### **Interventions on oral statements**

**226.** By convention, Members should not normally intervene on a Member who is delivering a statement.

### **Personal statements**

**227.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.52, the Presiding Officer may allow a Member to make a personal statement subject to receiving written notice of their intention to do so in advance.

**228.** Standing Order 12.53 requires personal statements to be brief and factual. It also specifies that personal statements cannot be subject to debate. In practice, this means that no other Member can be called to contribute to any such item of business.

**229.** In practice, personal statements have been a rare occurrence and have previously been made, for example, when Members have crossed the floor or resigned as a committee chair.

## 90 Second Statements

**230.** Following questions on Wednesday, Members may make a statement, lasting no longer than 90 seconds to raise any subject of concern. For example, Members may raise matters of pressing concern to their constituents, draw attention to local issues, mark anniversaries or significant dates, or pay a tribute.

**231.** Members are required to submit a request via the [Plenary Requests mailbox](#) by 10:00 on Wednesday, together with an overview of the topic. In the event the item is oversubscribed, the Presiding Officer will determine which Members to call. These personal statements must also be brief, factual and must not be subject to debate.

## Written statements

**232.** In accordance with Standing Orders 14.6 and 14.7, written statements can be issued by the Government or the Commission on any matter within their respective responsibilities.

**233.** Written statements issued by the Government are published on the [Government's website](#).

## Urgent business

### Emergency oral questions

**234.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.67, Members may apply to the Presiding Officer to ask emergency oral questions to Ministers or Commissioners. These questions are taken without notice and are subject to different tabling rules to ordinary oral questions. More information on oral questions can be obtained from the Table Office.

### Criteria for emergency oral questions

**235.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.67(ii), a question will only be deemed urgent if it has arisen suddenly and the Presiding Officer believes it is of urgent national significance.

**236.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.68, if an emergency question is tabled that relates to Senedd Commission functions, the decision on whether it is of urgent national significance is taken by the Deputy Presiding Officer as opposed to the Presiding Officer. This is to ensure that there is no conflict of interest as a consequence of the Presiding Officer's role as Chair of the Commission.

### **Timing for emergency oral questions**

**237.** Emergency questions can be taken during Plenary at any time determined by the Presiding Officer but Standing Orders require that the Presiding Officer is given at least two hours notice. As emergency questions will only be on the most critical of matters, it is anticipated that, subject to when the question is submitted, the Presiding Officer will normally schedule them as the first item of business in Plenary.

**238.** Emergency questions do not have allocated time under Standing Orders but the usual practice has been for an indicative timing of 10 minutes to be allocated.

### **Supplementary questions to emergency oral questions**

**239.** Members may be called to ask supplementary questions once the Minister has replied to the emergency question as tabled. Members are called at the Presiding Officer's discretion and will normally be allowed only one supplementary.

### **Grouped emergency oral questions**

**240.** Precedent exists for emergency (formerly urgent) oral questions to be grouped for answer. When two or more emergency oral questions are grouped, the indicative 10 minutes allotted for each question will be added together.

### **Urgent debates**

**241.** In accordance with Standing Order 12.69, urgent debates are permitted in Plenary meetings on a proposal by any Member, subject to the procedure and requirements outlined in Standing Orders 12.69-12.71. Urgent debates may be held on matters within the Welsh Government's or the Senedd Commission's responsibilities.

**242.** A Member must apply to the Presiding Officer for an urgent debate on a topic. For the application to proceed, the Presiding Officer must be satisfied that the issue is of urgent public importance. If the Presiding Officer agrees, the Member must then make the case for a debate to the whole Senedd; and the debate will only go ahead if the Senedd agrees to it. In practice, in light of other procedures available to Members to raise urgent matters, urgent debates have been a relatively rare occurrence: only four have taken place to date.

### **The urgent debate itself**

**243.** Urgent debates take place on a particular matter, and not on a motion. No motion needs to be tabled for such debate to proceed and, as such, no vote is

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taken at the end of the debate. Urgent debates are intended for discussion rather than decision.

**244.** The proposing Member will open any urgent debate. Other Members who wish to speak will normally be called at the Presiding Officer's discretion. The relevant Minister or Commissioner will be called as the penultimate speaker, before the proposing Member closes the debate.