

Annual Report 2023

June 2023



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/SeneddPetitions

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About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Jack Sargeant MS**
Welsh Labour



Rhys ab Owen MS
Independent Plaid Cymru
Member



Luke Fletcher MS
Plaid Cymru



Joel James MS
Welsh Conservatives



Buffy Williams MS
Welsh Labour

The following Members attended as substitutes:



Heledd Fychan MS
Plaid Cymru



Jane Bryant MS
Welsh Labour



Rhianon Passmore MS
Welsh Labour



Altaf Hussain MS
Welsh Conservatives

Contents

Chair's foreword	5
1. Strategic Direction	6
Committee remit.....	6
Innovations and research	9
2. Petitions debated between May 2022 and April 2023.....	10
3. Petitions of the Year.....	11
Water safety and drowning prevention	12
Outcome	12
Don't leave metastatic breast cancer patients in Wales behind.....	13
Outcome	13
Improve Endometriosis Healthcare in Wales.....	14
Outcome	14
Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement	15
Outcome	15
Ban greyhound racing in Wales	16
Outcome	16

Chair's foreword

This last year has seen the Senedd's petitions process finding new ways to ensure the people of Wales can have their voice heard in the Welsh Parliament.

We've held some amazing debates, met more petitioners, and brought the issues that matter to the people of Wales to the attention of Ministers, our Parliament, and to the wider public.

At the start of this Senedd, we agreed as a committee to prioritise our time on those petitions where we felt we could make a difference – this has paid great dividends in our second full year of work. We've completed inquiries and published a range of reports looking at water safety, greyhound racing, young people in the care system, and the consequences of shifting to a four day week. Those reports – and the recommendations we made – will deliver real change to the policies, funding priorities and activities of the Welsh Government. They have delivered real change for petitioners, and the wider people of Wales.

And we aren't stopping there. Already this year, we have begun a new inquiry looking at why so many people in Wales were forced on to prepayment meters. We have also requested a range of debates for the summer and autumn terms.

In addition to reflecting on our own work and practices as part of our annual report, I'm pleased that we are also working with academics at the University of Leeds to get their independent input in to how we can improve the way we work. Their research is looking at barriers to participation, and how we can open up opportunities for more people in Wales to raise the issues that matter most to them. I look forward to reading their conclusions later this year.

The petitions process continues to raise key issues – about our health services, about the languages we use and the way we get around – whether in the car, on foot, or by public transport. This report includes some inspirational examples: our nominees to be the Petition of the Year. I hope you'll read them (and vote for your favourite). But I also hope you'll ask yourself whether there's a petition you could create. Because the change you want to see could start with that simple question, and a few clicks on our website. What are you waiting for?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JACK SARGEANT." The signature is written in a cursive style. A horizontal line with an arrowhead at the right end is drawn below the signature, starting from the bottom of the 'J' and extending to the right.

Jack Sargeant, Chair, Petitions Committee

1. Strategic Direction

This chapter sets out the strategic priorities and objectives of the Petitions Committee.

1. The Committee agreed some strategic priorities and objectives at the beginning of the sixth Senedd to guide its work.

Committee remit

2. The remit of this Committee, as agreed by the Senedd on 23 June 2021, is:

"[...] to carry out the functions of the responsible committee set out in Standing Order 23."

3. In our initial discussion Members acknowledged that – uniquely among Senedd Committees – the Petitions Committee's agenda is set by the people of Wales, and the issues they feel passionately about.

4. The Committee agreed the following aims:

We will prioritise work that can bring real change to our communities.

We will be a visible committee that gets out and about and engages with people across Wales.

We will encourage higher quality petitions that can shape policy and promote successful examples of petitions leading to policy change.

Monitoring and evaluation

5. The Committee has continued to be mindful of the importance of regularly reflecting on its work, process and impact, as highlighted in the **report**¹ produced at the end of the Fifth Senedd by academic fellow Prof Diana Stirbu.

¹ Power, influence and Impact of Senedd Committees: Developing a framework for measuring committees' effectiveness, Prof Diana Stirbu, UCL. May 2021.

- 6.** The Committee routinely reviews its work in a short private session at the end of every meeting and looks ahead at the pipeline of petitions that are gathering signatures.
- 7.** The Committee’s annual report is an opportunity to take stock and reflect in more depth, and to consider whether any other aspect of the petition process need further work.
- 8.** Last year we published figures for the year May 2021-April 2022, to reflect the first 12 months since the 2021 Welsh General Election. This year, to provide consistent year-on-year figures we have switched to financial year reporting (April-March) – in line with data gathering and reporting conventions across the Senedd Commission.

Table 1: petitions data

	Apr 21- Mar 22	Apr 22- Mar 23
New petitions:	248	187
Rejected (rejected by clerking team):	162	103
Petitions considered for committee and volume of signatures:	85 (197,342)	56 (127,257)
Petitions over 10k:	6	5

9. There has been a drop in the number of petitions and the number of signatures during the year. This cooling off, from a peak during the COVID pandemic, is not unique to Wales, and is also seen in the UK and Scottish Parliament petitions data. However, it should be noted that the volume of petitions and signatures in Wales remains higher than in 2018/19.

10. In January, the Committee requested a deeper look at some of the underlying data behind the petitions system to see what lessons could be learned. Analysis of traffic to the Senedd’s petitions websites shows that 90% of visits now occur on a mobile device, with just 10% on a desktop computer. Some 45% of visitors come directly to the petition (for example, by clicking on a link shared in an email, text or messaging app). A similar percentage come from social media – mostly Facebook, but some Twitter and a small amount from Instagram). We are considering what this means for our own work, and the benefits of offering additional sharing buttons for other platforms.

11. As a result of the Committee’s discussions of the figures, the clerking team has published additional information to support petitioners in promoting their petitions, highlighting things that have worked for other petitioners.

<https://senedd.wales/senedd-business/petitions/promote-your-petition/>

Ways of working

12. Members and witnesses have continued to make use of the hybrid provisions first adopted during the COVID pandemic. This has given Committee Members (and particularly substitute Members) greater flexibility to combine their committee work with constituency responsibilities. In addition, it has allowed a wider range of witnesses to give evidence to the Committee, for example, in recent weeks a petitioner was able to combine participating in the meeting while still conducting previously agreed appointments in north Wales. The same day, The i newspaper journalist Dean Kirby was also able to give evidence to the Committee from his desk, without travelling to Cardiff Bay.

Petition handovers



13. The Committee has met petitioners and received a number of petitions on the Senedd steps. This has served as a photo-op for campaigners to promote their cause, and a chance for

Members to ask questions about what inspired the petition and what the petitioners hope to achieve.

14. Over the last year this has included handovers for petitions regarding: rapid response services in Monmouth; preserving the Cambrian Mountains; metastatic breast cancer; and the changing nature of veterinary services in Wales.

Visits

15. The Committee visited Ponsticill Reservoir in May 2022 to inform its work on water safety and see first-hand the issues involved in making large areas of water. Early in 2023, the Committee visited a new housing development in St Mellons, as part of its research into renewable energy generation and fuel poverty.

Innovations and research

16. During the year, the Petitions Committee has begun monitoring who creates petitions, by asking creators to fill in a short form asking a range of questions. We will be analysing these figures at the end of the summer term, to better understand who creates petitions, who doesn't, and what the barriers to participation might be. It will allow us to find ways of ensuring that our petitions process works for everyone in Wales.

17. In recent months the Committee's clerking team have been working closely with researchers at the University of Leeds, who are investigating the barriers to engagement with both the Senedd and the UK Parliament.

18. We look forward to receiving the results of focus groups – both with petitioners and those who have not previously engaged with the Senedd's petitions process – later this year. We anticipate that this work will include recommendations to ensure our process and promotional materials are as accessible as possible.

2. Petitions debated between May 2022 and April 2023

Table 2: petitions debates

Petition	Date of debate
Provide a clinical pathway, medical care, and specialists for people with Tourette's syndrome in Wales 10,393 signatures	25 May 2022
Save A&E. Withybush General Hospital must retain 24 hour, 7 days a week, Consultant Led urgent care 10,678 signatures	29 June 2022
Extend section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Levels Act (Wales) 2016 10,572 signatures	28 September 2022
Don't leave metastatic breast cancer patients in Wales behind 14,106 signatures	19 October 2022
Protect Mid-Wales unique Cambrian Mountains: designate them an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty 20,856 signatures (17,285 of these on paper)	30 November 2022
Ban greyhound racing in Wales 35,101 signatures	8 March 2023

3. Petitions of the Year

The Committee is committed to promoting the petitions process, and to showcasing how the people of Wales can generate real change in their communities, and in national policy.

19. The following case studies are our nominations as our second Petition of the Year. Petitions of the Year is a new concept, that we introduced last year with the intention to showcase successful or notable petitions. It is part of the Committee's desire to promote successful examples of petitions leading to policy change.

20. In line with the idea that it is the people of Wales who set the agenda for the Petitions Committee, the people of Wales will be able to choose which petition has had the greatest impact. We will create a twitter vote to allow followers to vote for which of the nominated petitions they think has had the greatest impact.

21. There are several high-profile petitions which have had a notable impact over the last 12 months but have not yet been closed – either because we are awaiting further developments, or we are monitoring delivery of any recommended changes. These petitions will be eligible for next year's award.

22. We have identified the following petitions to be included in Petition of the Year 2023, which will be subject to a public vote.

Water safety and drowning prevention

Mark Allen's Law - we want throwline stations around all open water sites in Wales

Mark Allen, aged 18, drowned after jumping into a freezing reservoir on a hot day in June 2018. In May 2019 we watched whilst 3 throwlines were installed where he died. Mark could have possibly been saved if they were in place beforehand.

We, Mark's family and friends, feel that it should be law that throwlines like those placed where Mark died should be placed in designated places around every reservoir, lake, canal etc. Speaking to people who work in water safety, e.g. fire services etc., such throwlines have saved many lives. We want to save lives and save people from going through the heartbreak and tragedy of losing someone they love to drowning.

23. Our inquiry looked in-depth at the issues arising from this petition, heard evidence from Water Safety Wales, water utilities companies, The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), and Natural Resources Wales to gain a fuller picture of the context, challenges and action needed to increase water safety and prevent drowning. We also visited Pontsticill Reservoir, to see for ourselves the difficulties involved in making vast water sites safe.

24. We met families who have lost loved ones and heard about the devastating impact such a tragedy has had on their lives, but also of their steely determination to raise awareness and prevent future loss of life through drowning. We are grateful for their time, their honesty, and their willingness to share their trauma so that others might benefit.

Outcome

25. This petition raised public awareness, having collected a total of 11,027 signatures. It forms part of a wider campaign undertaken by Mark's mother to raise awareness of the risks, educate the public and campaign for action to promote water safety and prevent drowning.

26. Our report made six recommendations with five accepted and one accepted in principle by the Welsh Government, including allocating a specific Minister to ensure leadership of this work.

27. It also resulted in an emotional debate in the Senedd, where the petition and the call for improvement received cross-party support. With the support of the petitioner Leeanne Bartley, there was positive media coverage highlighting the risks, the campaign for improved safety and the work of the Committee.

Don't leave metastatic breast cancer patients in Wales behind

People living with metastatic breast cancer (MBC) in Wales are being badly let down by the system. Currently, Wales has just one dedicated secondary breast cancer clinical nurse specialist (CNS), a situation that leaves potentially hundreds of people without adequate support. We need to know how many people are living with MBC to improve services. And we want improve quality of life outcomes by raising awareness of MBC red flag symptoms.

We are calling for:

1. Every person with Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) in Wales to have access to a dedicated secondary breast cancer clinical nurse specialist.
2. A collection of data of those living and being treated for MBC in Wales

28. The petitioner, who has metastatic breast cancer (MBC), is campaigning with others to improve data collection and cancer services to patients. We agreed that this petition, which collected 14,106 signatures, should be debated in the Senedd at the earliest opportunity.

29. We were humbled to meet the petitioner and her supporters, which include health professionals and cancer charities, to receive her petition. We learnt about Tassia's commitment to improve health and support services for others in the future, because of her own and others' poor experiences of diagnosis, care and support. We have written to the Minister for Health and Social Services several times to seek information and clarity.

Outcome

30. A passionate and heartfelt debate took place in October 2022, calling for action to ensure those with metastatic breast cancer receive the care and support they require to navigate this challenging path. It also contributed to the work to raise awareness and understanding of secondary breast cancer, which is an important aspect of Tassia Haines' dedicated campaigning.

31. Some positive steps forward have been taken including a commitment to audit primary and secondary breast cancer care, to provide insight into the care received by people, to support improved service delivery. Whilst the introduction of a new cancer information system to allow better routine use of data relating to metastatic cancer and the Wales Cancer Network's work on a set of nationally agreed metastatic cancer pathways, starting with metastatic breast cancer, is welcomed – it isn't enough.

32. The petitioner has showed strength and determination and continues to question and challenge the lack of appropriate support services for MBC patients.

Improve Endometriosis Healthcare in Wales

Endometriosis devastates the lives of women and their families living in Wales with 1 in 10 suffering with the condition.

The cause of endometriosis is unknown, there is no cure, the average diagnosis time is currently 8.5 years and there's a 6 year waiting list for treatment on the NHS.

The demonstrable lack of understanding of the condition is detrimentally impacting society at all levels. Funding therefore needs to be prioritised to ensure equality of healthcare in Wales.

A report commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2018 highlighted how big a problem we're facing with resources being wasted and harm currently being caused to individuals suffering with Endometriosis. Despite the findings showing impacts on healthcare, education, economic, financial and social levels within society, most recommendations haven't been adopted, and in many areas things have instead worsened for sufferers of Endometriosis.

Please sign this petition to help raise awareness of Endometriosis and encourage the Welsh Government to allocate the appropriate level of funding for this condition so we can take steps towards achieving equality of healthcare in Wales.

33. This petition received 5,895 signatures and rather than debate in the Senedd we decided to support this petitioner to raise awareness of endometriosis, its impact, and concerns regarding the lack of health provision through social media channels.

Outcome

34. Beth Hales, the petitioner, worked closely with the Senedd to produce social media content to share her campaign and message – effectively raising awareness of the need to improve endometriosis care and contributed to an informative research [blog](#) to support this.

35. We have received correspondence from the Minister and all Health Boards and highlighted the need for further research in this field. We've also emphasised the importance of engaging with people with lived experience of the condition in the development of the Women's Health Plan.

36. Whilst some progress is being made there is a significant challenge ahead to meet the needs of women with this debilitating condition. We await the publication of the Women's Health Plan in autumn 2023 and will consider the petition again then.

Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement

We believe that many care leavers walk out of their placements because little thought is given to their previous experiences or to their mental wellbeing even though a baby has the right to stay with its parent/s if it is safe to do so.

Many care leavers have social services intervention, when they give birth. This is often due to their history and/or lack of their own parental guidance. These care leavers will undoubtedly have experienced trauma in their childhoods and often suffer from anxiety into their adult lives. They have often never felt safe in their homes as a child and having their own space has been their only safe haven where they are totally relaxed. Currently, if there is any concern, a parent is taken away from their home, family and friends then placed in a foster home or residential home to be assessed with little thought to the parent's triggers and mental wellbeing. We believe that this often causes a roller coaster of emotions and parents then walk away from placements only to forever regret a rash decision made in a moment of anxiety that wouldn't have happened if the situation had been dealt with more empathically. We want to fact find to see if a better solution for parent and child is needed.

37. Whilst the petition seeks to ensure that data is collected and published to improve outcomes, we wanted to learn more about the experience of becoming a parent for people who have experienced care in their own childhoods.

38. The evidence we received during the inquiry made for uncomfortable listening. We heard of prejudice and prejudgement, and harrowing tales of individuals struggling to build better lives for themselves and their loved ones. But we also heard more hopeful tales: of services that are providing the support people need; and of individuals overcoming considerable challenges to follow their journey as parents.

Outcome

39. The Welsh Government accepted two of the six recommendations made in the report, and the other four in principle, reflecting that some will need further exploration. This includes considering how to collect the data called for and reviewing the success of preventative support focused on keeping families together before deciding on a future approach and funding. The Deputy Minister commits to improving the experiences of children and young people, to try to prevent as many coming into care by providing more preventative support.

Ban greyhound racing in Wales

In Wales we have one independent greyhound track racing once a week. Since April 2018, Hope Rescue & their rescue partners have taken in almost 200 surplus greyhounds from this track, 40 of which sustained injuries. There are plans for the track to become a Greyhound Board of Great Britain track, racing four times a week, greatly increasing the number of surplus dogs & injuries. Greyhound racing is inherently cruel & greyhounds have little legal protection. It is already banned in 41 US states.

40. The petition was submitted by Hope Rescue and collected 35,101 signatures from all corners of the world with 18,707 of these from Wales.

41. The Committee decided to take evidence and produce a short report. We heard evidence from greyhound welfare charities and those currently involved with greyhound racing. Our priority as a committee has been the welfare of greyhounds, which was central to our consideration of the evidence.

42. Our majority conclusion was to support the growing calls for a ban on greyhound racing in Wales. While one Member had concerns about supporting a ban, we are all agreed that the Welsh Government should consider all options when consulting on future arrangements, to ensure that the welfare of greyhounds is paramount – at all stages of their lives.

Outcome

43. Our report **The Final Bend?** made five recommendations to the Welsh Government, four of which were accepted, and they will proceed to consult on whether greyhound racing should be banned.

44. This report was debated in the Senedd in March 2023 where we heard strong and passionate views, mostly supporting the need for further action to protect greyhounds including consultation on a phased ban.

45. The petitioner Hope Rescue worked hard to raise awareness and highlight concerns, and the petition and the debate resulted in focus in the media in Wales and beyond. The Welsh Government intends to consult later this year and will seek views on a ban.