

Inquiry into Lobbying – Standards of Conduct Committee Consultation

The Standards of Conduct Committee (the Committee) are undertaking an inquiry into Lobbying.

The Committee is keen to establish whether lobbying is a matter of concern to the people of Wales, and whether there is more that could be done to increase transparency around decision making in Wales.

Plaid Cymru Senedd Group Response

1. The Plaid Cymru Senedd Group (the Group) welcome the Committee's inquiry into lobbying. Politics in Wales should be conducted in as open and transparent a manner as is possible, so that the people of Wales can have confidence in their politicians, and the decisions that they take.
2. In response to the Committee's inquiry into lobbying in the 5th Senedd, the Group supported the establishment of a Register of Lobbying Organisations. This remains the Group's position. The concerning absence of a Register of Lobbying Organisations in Wales is in contrast to the situation in other nations across the British Isles and Europe, where mandatory registers are in place.
3. 'Lobbying/lobbyists' sometimes brings negative connotations in the minds of the general public, and that this hasn't been helped by ongoing lobbying and second-job scandals that have taken place in Westminster in recent times. Nonetheless, lobbying can provide additional subject specific knowledge on complex policy issues or legislation, which Members of the Senedd don't necessarily have access to within their own structures due to the well documented limited human and financial resource capacity of Opposition Groups in comparison to the situation in other legislatures across the UK.
4. Cross-Party Groups play an integral role in facilitating discussions and debate on a number of wide ranging issues, that often may not get significant recognition in other aspects of parliamentary business due to the recognised lack of capacity within Senedd structures e.g. reduction in amount of meetings conducted by Scrutiny Committees. The Group believes that the current rules governing the operation of Cross-Party Groups, in particular the requirement to publish details on membership, minutes and information of meetings as well as the requirement to publish an Annual Report and Financial Statement are effective, sufficient and proportionate.
5. Given the importance of ensuring compliance with any rules, regulations and guidelines linked to lobbying, the Group believe the Senedd could and should provide induction training to Members on what expectations are placed upon them, especially in their capacity as Chairs of Cross-Party Groups for instance.
6. Should the Committee make any specific recommendations on the structure or inclusion of specific types of lobbying within any proposed guidelines and rules, consideration should be given to the change in general work practises since the pandemic. That is, if meetings or lobbying efforts are to be declared, the same standard should be applied to virtual/hybrid meetings as those that take place in person. Efforts should also be made to ensure that any proposed guidelines and rules do not limit the ability of individual volunteers or community campaign groups to lobby Members of the Senedd on local or national issues that may impact their constituents.