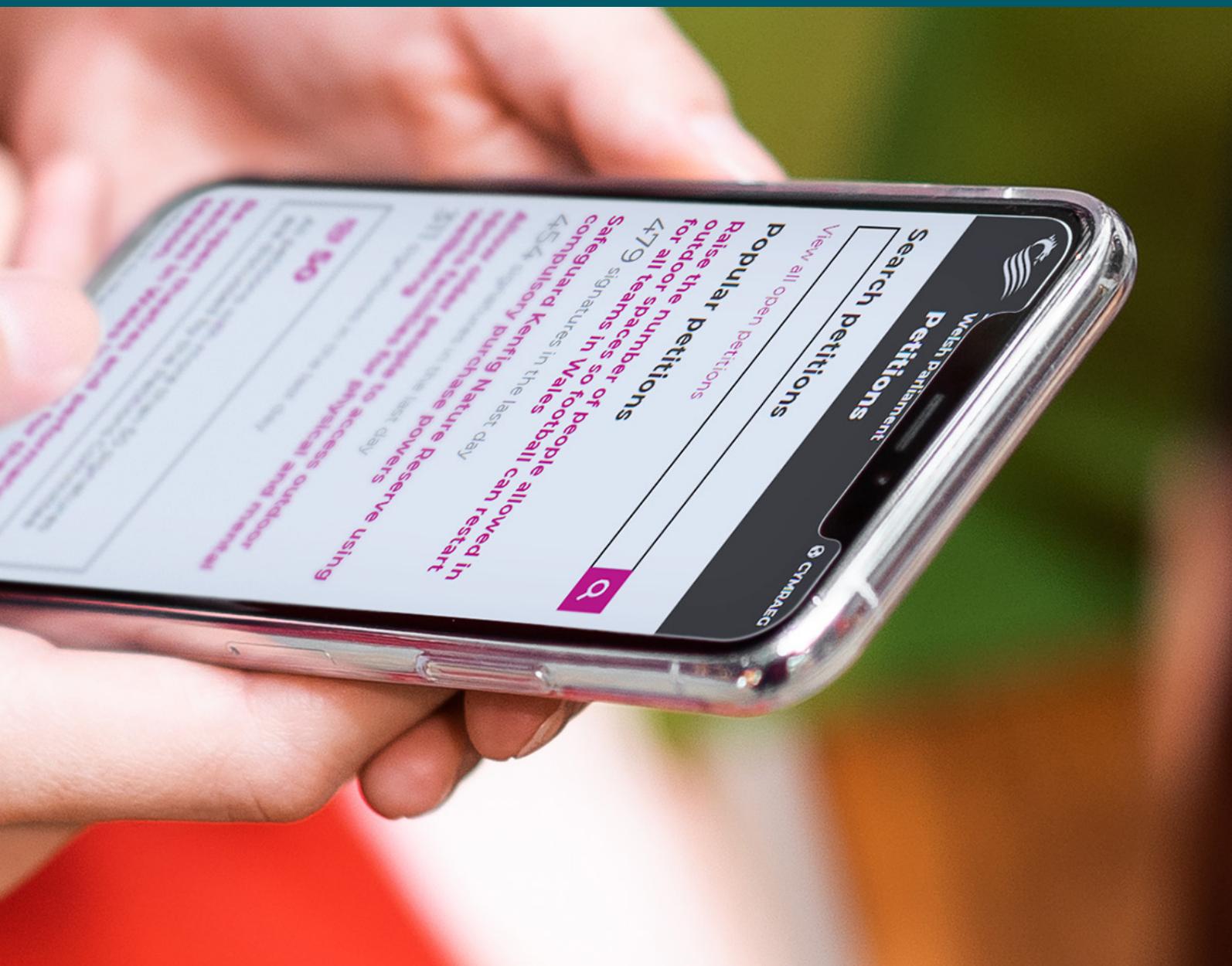


# Fifth Senedd Legacy Report

March 2021



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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# **Fifth Senedd Legacy Report**

March 2021



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016. Its remit can be found at:  
[www.senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions)

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## Committee Chair:



**Janet Finch-Saunders MS**  
Welsh Conservatives

## Current Committee membership:



**Michelle Brown MS**  
Independent



**Neil McEvoy MS**  
Propel



**Jack Sargeant MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Leanne Wood MS**  
Plaid Cymru

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## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that our successor committee should consider at the outset how it intends to identify the petitions on which it wishes to undertake detailed scrutiny, and to resource its work in line with that. ....Page 21

**Recommendation 2.** Our successor committee should seek to resolve most petitions in a timely manner, both for the benefit of petitioners and to ensure that it has the time and capacity to conduct detailed scrutiny on issues of its choosing. If petition volumes are maintained, this will likely mean agreeing to take no further action on some petitions following their initial consideration. ....Page 21

**Recommendation 3.** Based on our experience of considering time-sensitive petitions during the Covid-19 pandemic, we recommend that the next committee should give consideration to whether or not petitions should be referred to it at the first opportunity, even when they are still collecting signatures. This consideration should include whether this would cause practical difficulties and the impact that such a change would have on the administration of the petitions process. ....Page 22

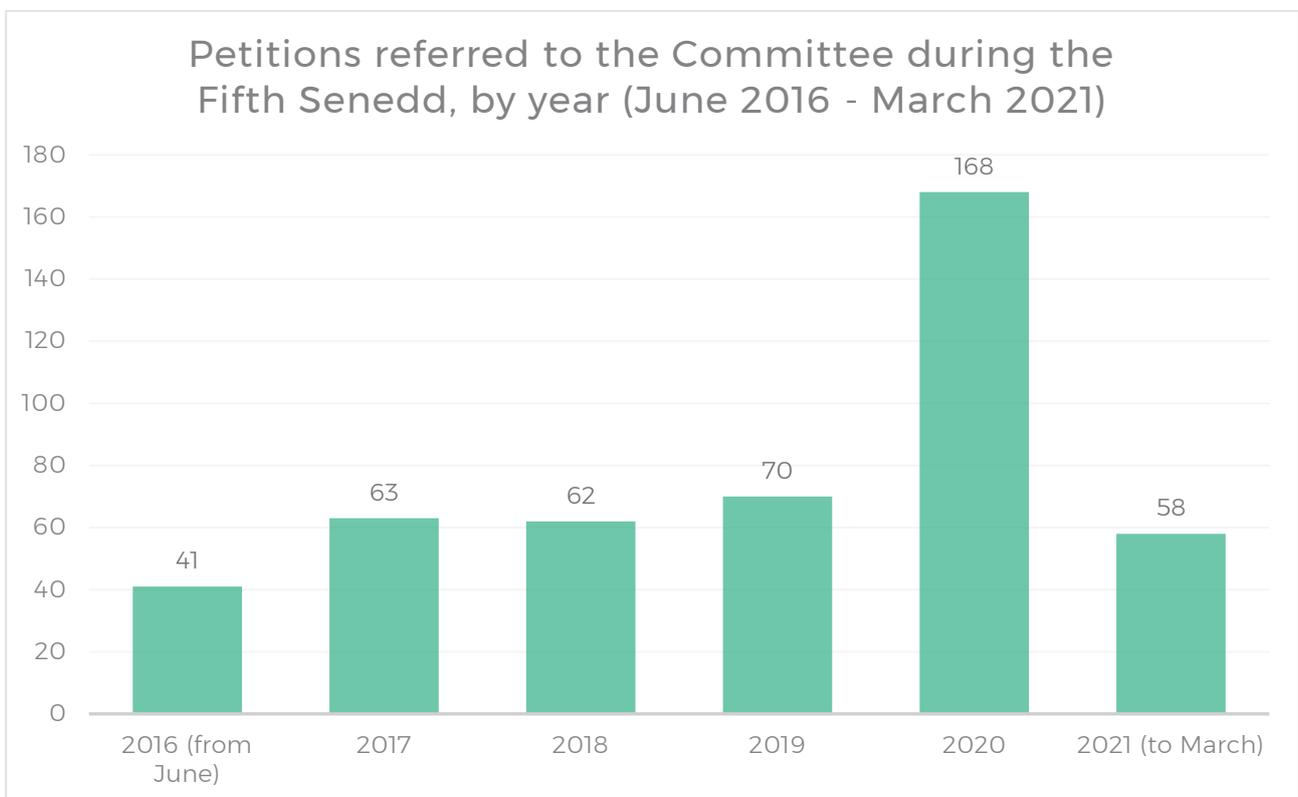
**Recommendation 4.** More detailed consideration should be given to whether the current 50 signature threshold for the consideration of petition remains appropriate, or whether it should be increased in the early part of the Sixth Senedd.....Page 23

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the threshold for considering debates on petitions should be maintained at 10,000 signatures and that the Petitions Committee should retain its discretion to determine which petitions are referred for a debate. We note that it may be possible for this threshold to be reduced in the future should the volume of petitioning reduce.....Page 24

## 1. Engaging with the people of Wales

The petitions process is one of the primary mechanisms through which the public can engage with and influence the work of the Senedd.

The use of the Senedd’s petitions system has grown steadily since it was introduced in 2007, however there has been a dramatic increase in the number of petitions received and the volume of signatures they have collected during the latter part of this Senedd term.



Whilst both of these measures have been increasing over the long-term, there are two primary factors behind the rapid increases in petitioning that have been seen recently:

1. the Covid-19 pandemic; and
2. the launch of a new Senedd petitions website in April 2020.

Since early 2020 Covid-19, and the changes to everyday life introduced in an effort to control the virus, have had profound implications for every person, business and organisation in Wales. It has resulted in a significant and sustained growth in the

number of petitions received, in particular since the Welsh Government began to seek to ease the first lockdown restrictions in May 2020. It has also caused a change in the type and subject-matter of petitions submitted to the Senedd, many of which now call for immediate changes to be made to regulations or support packages, as opposed to the previously more common petitions which seek long-term changes to policy or legislation.

Simultaneously, a new online petitions system for the Senedd was launched on 30 April 2020 and was the culmination of a two-year project to modernise and improve the experience of creating and signing petitions. It included a number of new features and improvements to the previous petitions website intended to make the petitions process simpler and more user-friendly, including a ‘mobile-first’ design, reflecting the fact that the majority of users now interact with petitions using mobile devices, and improved integration with social media.

Because of the simultaneous impact of both of these factors, it is difficult to determine whether the significant growth in the number and size of petitions experienced from May 2020 onwards has been due primarily to one or both of these factors. As a result, it is also difficult to predict whether the increase will be sustained over the medium and long-term.

However, it appears likely that at least some of the growth in petitions is likely to remain given the improved functionality and profile of the Senedd’s petitions process, allied with increased awareness of devolved powers and responsibilities as a result of the pandemic.

Petitions Committee  
**Our work during the Fifth Senedd**

NEW PETITIONS  
CONSIDERED BY  
THE COMMITTEE

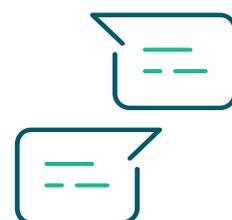
**462**



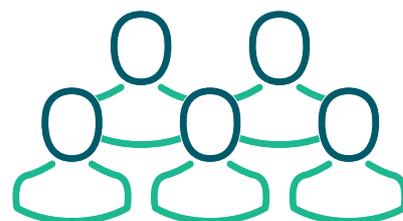
**14**  
COMMITTEE  
REPORTS

**30**

PETITIONS  
DEBATED



**1,000,000+**  
TOTAL NUMBER OF  
SIGNATORIES ON PETITIONS



**87**

**WITNESS**  
APPEARANCES

**LARGEST**  
PETITION

**67,940**  
SIGNATURES

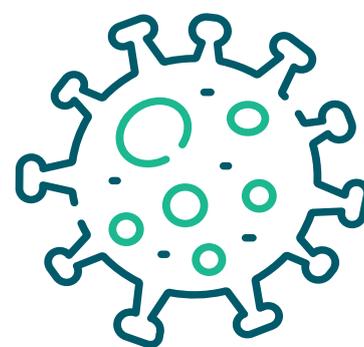


COMMITTEE  
MEETINGS



**81**

**192**  
ADMISSABLE  
PETITIONS  
ABOUT COVID-19



## 2. The petitions process

Since the Fifth Senedd's Petitions Committee was established in June 2016 we have implemented several significant changes to the petitions process. Many of these followed up the recommendations made by our predecessor committee in the Fourth Assembly as part of its 'Review of Public Petitions Arrangements'.<sup>1</sup>

In March 2017 the Senedd agreed to make several changes to Standing Order 23 (Public Petitions) on the basis of our recommendations. These were:

- to increase the number of signatures required for a petition to be considered by the Petitions Committee, from 10 to 50 signatures;
- to end the distinction between petitions from individuals and organisations (which had not previously been required to collect signatures);
- to restrict the eligibility for submitting petitions to people or organisations with a base in Wales; and
- to require petitions to have collected signatures using the Senedd's petitions system or on paper (i.e. to no longer accept petitions from other websites).

We also introduced a six month limit to the length of time in which petitions can collect signatures and agreed a new process with the Business Committee, under which we would consider referring petitions with more than 5,000 signatures to be debated during a Senedd Plenary meeting. This has enabled petitions with significant levels of support to be debated by the full Senedd within a shorter timeframe, in addition to our existing ability to hold debates on reports we have produced. All petitions with more than 50 signatures have continued to be scrutinised by the Petitions Committee.

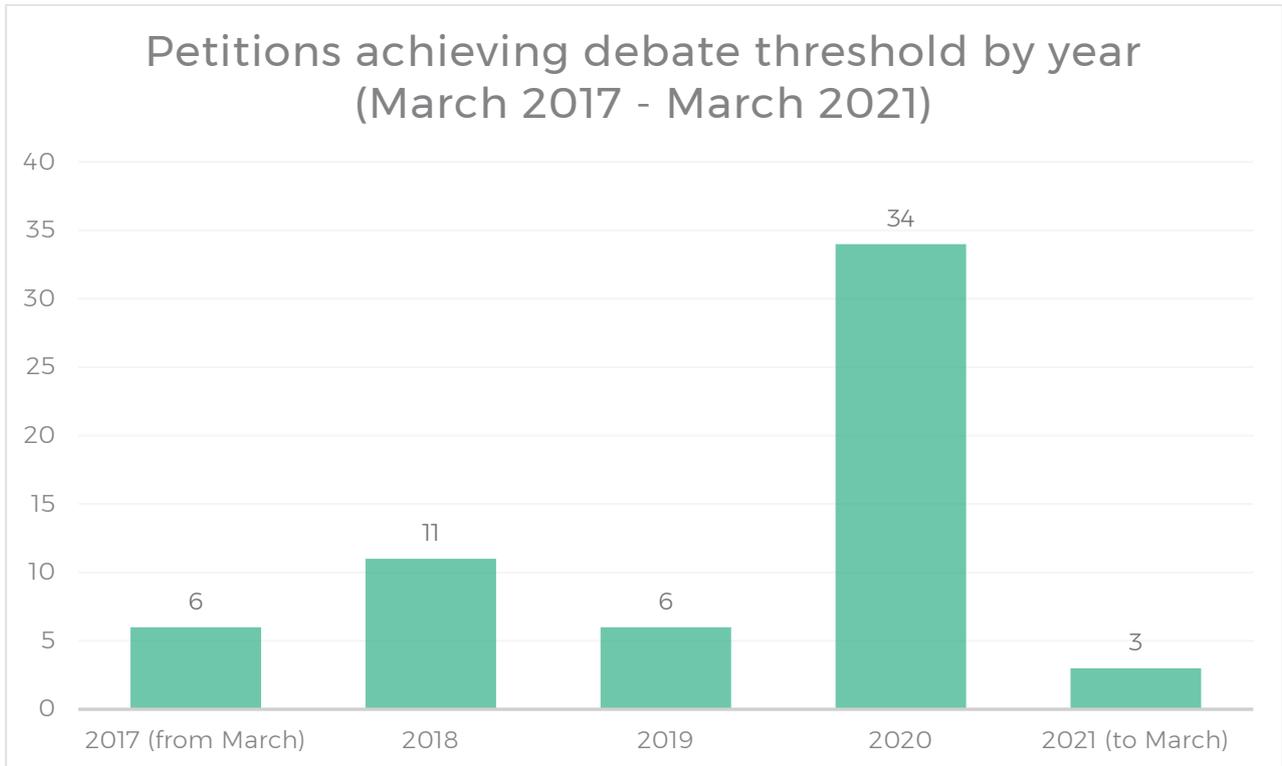
Since the introduction of this process in March 2017, 24 petitions have been debated as a result. Six other petitions have been debated on the basis of reports produced by the Petitions Committee. A table can be found in section 3 of this report.

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the increases in both the number of petitions being received and the number achieving the debate

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<sup>1</sup> Petitions Committee, [Review of Public Petitions Arrangements](#), February 2016

threshold (discussed in section 1), from 1 December 2020 we raised the threshold for considering debates on petitions to 10,000 signatures.



Nb. Threshold was introduced in March 2017 and changed from 5,000 to 10,000 signatures from 1 December 2020.

This was a difficult decision, which we took after careful consideration. We are acutely aware of the need to provide clear information and expectations to everyone using the petitions process and decided such a change was necessary because the rapid growth in the number of petitions achieving the threshold, and demands on Plenary time, meant that we were increasingly only able to schedule debates on a relatively small number of petitions.

We pledged to keep this threshold under review until the end of this Senedd. Our recommendation on this and several other issues relating to the petitions process can be found in section 4 of this report.

### 3. Work undertaken by the Petitions Committee

We have considered each petition referred to us on its own merits. The majority have been scrutinised through consideration of the matters that they raise at Committee meetings, whilst others have been selected for scrutiny in other ways.

#### Committee meetings

During the Fifth Senedd, we have considered a total of 462 new petitions. These petitions have collectively received more than 1 million signatures. In addition, we continued to consider updates on a number of petitions carried over from our predecessor Committee in the Fourth Assembly, meaning that we have considered more than 500 separate petitions over the past five years.

We have sought responses on all petitions referred to us from the Welsh Government and other organisations when appropriate to the issue raised.

We have offered the lead petitioner(s) the opportunity to provide further information or comment on the responses that we have received in advance of our discussion of their petition. The vast majority of petitions were considered at more than one committee meeting.

We have also held a number of evidence sessions with petitioners, Ministers and other witnesses to enable more detailed collection of evidence where we felt that this would aid our consideration of the issues raised.

#### Reports published by the Committee

We have published 14 reports on petitions during this Senedd. Some of these have been summaries of the evidence received, while others have included conclusions or recommendations for future action. Where we made recommendations we have sought and considered a formal response from the Welsh Government.

The following reports have been published during the Fifth Senedd:

Petition(s)	Date	
P-04-668 Support Yearly Screening for Ovarian Cancer	February 2017	<u>Report</u> made three recommendations. Two were accepted by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-05-710 Ensure Disabled People can Access Public Transport As and When They Need It	October 2017	<u>Report</u> made twelve recommendations. All were accepted by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-04-564 Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital	January 2018	<u>Summary of evidence</u> considered by the Committee.
P-04-472 Make the MTAN Law and Call in all opencast mining applications & P-04-575 Call in all opencast mining applications	April 2018	<u>Summary of evidence</u> considered by the Committee.
P-05-785 Suspend Marine Licence 12/45/ML to dump radioactive marine sediments from the Hinkley Point nuclear site into Wales coastal waters off Cardiff	May 2018	<u>Summary of evidence</u> considered by the Committee.
P-04-682 Routine Screening for Type 1 Diabetes in Children and Young People	July 2018	<u>Report</u> made ten recommendations. Seven were accepted and three accepted in principle by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-04-628 To improve access to Education and services in British Sign Language	October 2018	<u>Report</u> made four recommendations. Three were accepted and one accepted in principle by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-05-690 Resurfacing of the A40 Raglan-Abergavenny Road	October 2018	<u>Report</u> made one recommendation. The <u>Welsh Government</u> wrote to the Committee in response.
P-05-771 Reconsider the closure of the Welsh Independent Living Grant and support disabled people to live independently	February 2019	<u>Interim report</u> summarising the evidence received ahead of an evidence session with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services.
P-05-784 Prescription drug dependence and withdrawal - recognition and support	March 2019	<u>Report</u> made ten recommendations. Eight were accepted and one accepted in principle by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-05-736 To make mental health services more accessible	September 2019	<u>Report</u> made seven recommendations. Five were

Petition(s)	Date	
		accepted and two accepted in principle by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-04-433 CCTV in Slaughterhouses	January 2020	<u>Report</u> made three recommendations. One was accepted and two accepted in principle by the <u>Welsh Government</u> .
P-05-886 Stop the Red Route	March 2021	<u>Report</u> made six recommendations. The Committee was awaiting a response by the Welsh Government at the time of writing.
P-05-805 Fair Deal for Supply Teachers	March 2021	<u>Report</u> made four recommendations. The Committee was awaiting a response by the Welsh Government at the time of writing.

## Plenary debates held on petitions

We have held 30 debates on petitions during the Fifth Senedd. Six of these were debates on reports we have published whilst, since March 2017, we have also requested debates on petitions which have gathered large numbers of signatures (see section 2). This process has allowed issues of significant local or national concern to be discussed by the Senedd as a whole, without the Petitions Committee having been required to publish a report beforehand.

The following debates have been held during the Fifth Senedd:

Petition	Date	
P-04-668 Support Yearly Screening for Ovarian Cancer	29 March 2017	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>report</u> published by the Petitions Committee.
P-05-756 Live Music Protection in Wales	12 July 2017	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,383 signatures.
P-05-781 Port Talbot Community Against the Super Prison	6 December 2017	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 8,791 signatures.
P-05-710 Ensure Disabled People can Access Public Transport as and When They Need it	31 January 2018	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>report</u> published by the Petitions Committee.
P-05-796 Calling on the Welsh Government to Ban The Use of Wild Animals in Circuses in Wales	7 March 2018	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 6,398 signatures.
P-05-785 Suspend Marine Licence 12/45/ML to dump radioactive marine sediments from the	23 May 2018	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>report</u> published by the Petitions Committee.

Petition	Date	
Hinkley Point nuclear site into Wales coastal waters off Cardiff		
P-05-896 Pembrokeshire says NO!! To the closure of Withybush A&E!	26 September 2018	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 40,045 signatures.
P-04-682 Routine Screening for Type 1 Diabetes in Children and Young People	3 October 2018	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>report</u> published by the Petitions Committee.
P-05-828 Presumption in favour of rural schools	21 November 2018	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,125 signatures.
P-04-628 To improve access to Education and services in British Sign Language	6 February 2019	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>report</u> published by the Petitions Committee.
P-05-849 All men in Wales should have access through the NHS to the best possible diagnostic tests for prostate cancer	6 March 2019	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 6,345 signatures.
P-05-784 Prescription drug dependence and withdrawal - recognition and support	22 May 2019	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>report</u> published by the Petitions Committee.
P-05-869 Declare a Climate Emergency and fit all policies with zero-carbon targets	19 June 2019	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 6,148 signatures.
P-05-854 Make Learning Disability training mandatory for hospital staff	6 November 2019	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,654 signatures.
P-05-967 Welsh Government to amend its NDR relief policy to help keep Debenhams stores open in Wales	8 July 2020	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,790 signatures.
P-05-1003 Demand an EIA now on the dumping of radioactively contaminated mud in Welsh waters	21 October 2020	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 10,692 signatures.
P-05-992 We call on the Welsh Government to create a common body of knowledge about Welsh history that all pupils will learn	4 November 2020	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 7,927 signatures.
P-05-1000 Make it compulsory for Black and POC UK histories to be taught in the Welsh education curriculum	4 November	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 34,736 signatures.

Petition	Date	
P-05-1060 Allow supermarkets to sell “non-essential” items during lockdown	11 November 2020	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 67,940 signatures.
P-05-1010 An independent inquiry into the 2020 flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf so that lessons are learned	9 December 2020	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,743 signatures.
P-05-1074 Raise the number of people allowed in outdoor spaces so football can restart for all teams in Wales	13 January 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,330 signatures.
P-05-1063 Open golf courses as it plays an integral part to the improvement of both physical and mental health	13 January 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 6,317 signatures.
P-05-1053 Keep gyms open and consider them as important as shops should another national lockdown take place	13 January 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 20,616 signatures.
P-05-1032 Legislate to prevent people from changing Welsh house names	20 January 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 18,103 signatures.
P-05-1117 Give Police Officers the Covid Vaccination as a priority	3 March 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 10,879 signatures.
P-05-1119 Prioritise teachers, school and childcare staff for COVID-19 vaccination	3 March 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 16,288 signatures.
P-05-1001 Hold an independent inquiry into the choice of site for the proposed new Velindre Cancer Centre	3 March 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,241 signatures.
P-05-1018 Support for the current proposed plans to build a new Velindre Cancer Centre, Cardiff, in any future inquiry	3 March 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 11,392 signatures.
P-05-1078 Increase funding for mental health services and improve waiting times for people needing help in crisis. We need a change!	10 March 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,159 signatures.
P-05-1056 Give Local Authorities powers to control the housing	17 March 2021	<u>Debate</u> on a <u>petition</u> which collected 5,386 signatures.

Petition	Date	
market in rural and tourist areas of Wales		

## Petition outcomes

Determining what constitutes a successful petition is often not straightforward. Ultimately, whether or not a petition has achieved its aims depends upon the objectives or aspirations of the petitioner and those signing and supporting it.

The role of the Petitions Committee and the Senedd’s petitions process is to apply scrutiny to the issues raised by petitions. We have ensured, therefore, that all petitions referred to the Committee receive a formal response from the relevant decision-maker (usually from the Welsh Government) and are discussed by the Petitions Committee. This is considered as an outcome or a ‘success’ in itself by many petitioners, for whom the petitions process is as much about raising the profile of an issue or the ability to make their voices heard as the eventual result. For others, a petition is often part of a wider campaign or set of actions.

Given the number of petitions received, it is our role as a Committee to select which issues to give more detailed consideration to. We have done this through holding evidence sessions, seeking further written evidence, referring them to be considered to another Senedd committee, or publishing reports on the issues raised. As referred to in other sections, other petitions have been debated by the Senedd as a whole.

A significant number of petitions we have considered have achieved some or all of their aims. Whilst not an exhaustive list, the following is a list of some of the petitions which have achieved outcomes during the Fifth Senedd:

### **P-05-772 No to Flint Castle's planned Iron Ring**

The petition called for a proposed sculpture outside of Flint Castle to be scrapped due to the perception that it celebrated the “Iron Ring” of castles that Edward I built as part of his military campaign in Wales.

The installation was cancelled by the Welsh Government and the investment diverted to make improvements to the visitor experience at the castle.

**P-05-781 Port Talbot Community Against the Super Prison**

The petition was submitted in opposition to a proposal for land owned by the Welsh Government to be sold to the Ministry of Justice for the development of a ‘super prison’ in Baglan.

During our consideration of the petition, the Welsh Government indicated that they would not facilitate any further prison development and the proposal was withdrawn.

**P-05-789 Review support for asylum seekers accessing further education**

The petition sought for access to financial support programmes to be changed so that asylum seekers would be better supported to participate in further education.

The Welsh Government published its Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan in January 2019, which included plans to implement actions called for by the petition.

**P-05-796 Calling on the Welsh Government to Ban The Use of Wild Animals in Circuses in Wales**

During our consideration of the petition the Welsh Government committed to bringing forward legislation to ban the use of wild animals in circuses.

The Wild Animals in Circuses (Wales) Act 2020 was agreed by the Senedd on 15 July 2020 and became law on 7 September 2020.

**P-05-797 Ensure access to the cystic fibrosis medicine, Orkambi, as a matter of urgency**

The petition called for a resolution to negotiations about access to the new cystic fibrosis medicine, Orkambi®, on the NHS.

In November 2019 the Welsh Government agreed a deal to make Orkambi® and another cystic fibrosis drug available to patients through the NHS in Wales.

**P-05-801 Save the trees and ground in Roath Mill and Roath Brook Gardens before it's too late**

This petition urged Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to stop and review flood prevention work which would widen a brook and cause the felling of a number of trees.

During our consideration of the petition, NRW undertook a re-assessment of the work planned in Roath Mill and Roath Brook Gardens and decided not to proceed with the final stages of the scheme.

### **P-05-816 Say 'NO' to pheasant shooting on Welsh public land**

The petition was submitted with the aim of preventing further commercial shooting operations on publicly-owned land.

It was confirmed in July 2018 that NRW's Board had agreed it would not offer any extension to the leases for pheasant shooting rights once they expire in March 2019, following an intervention by the Welsh Government.

### **P-05-817 Specialist prosthetics for child amputees**

The petition called for funding to enable child amputees in Wales to have access to specialist sports prosthetics.

During our consideration of the petition, the Welsh Government announced the creation of a new fund to provide sports prosthetics for children and young people in Wales in October 2019.

### **P-05-854 Make learning disability training mandatory for hospital staff**

The petitioners called for training on learning disabilities to be provided to all healthcare staff following the death of their brother in 2009.

During a Plenary debate on the petition, the Welsh Government announced that learning disability awareness training would be incorporated into the core training programme for all healthcare staff as part of mandatory equality and diversity training, supported by more in-depth targeted training for staff in key roles.

### **P-05-856 Ban the sale of puppies by pet shops and all commercial 3rd party dealers in Wales (Lucy's Law)**

The petition called for a ban on the sale of puppies by pet shops and all commercial third-party dealers.

On 23 March 2021, the Senedd agreed the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 which will make it an offence for commercial third parties to sell puppies and kittens under 6 months from September 2021.

**P-05-906 Save Sam Davies Ward at Barry Hospital**

The petition sought to prevent the closure of an older persons' acute rehabilitation ward at Barry Hospital.

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board acknowledged the petition and agreed to review keep the ward open in the immediate term and to further review plans as part a wider set of reforms.

**P-05-946 Save Royal Glamorgan A&E**

The petition was submitted following a proposal to replace A&E at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital with a minor Injuries unit, as part of the wider South Wales Programme.

In June 2020, following the community campaign, the petition and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided that proposals around A&E services should be paused and that a full A&E services to remain in place.

**P-05-995 Freedom to Donate Blood**

The petition called for the restrictions preventing gay and bisexual men from donating blood unless they had abstained from having sex to be lifted.

It was announced in December 2020 that rules which prevented many gay men from donating blood would be changed.

**P-05-1019 Award teacher predicted grades to all Welsh students for examination 2020**

The petition called for all students receiving results in 2020 to receive 'Centre Assessed Grades' without any external moderation, in response to concerns raised about the fairness of those grades.

In August 2020, the Welsh Government announced that A level, AS, GCSE, Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate grades in Wales would be awarded on the basis of Centre Assessment Grades.

**P-05-1025 Ensure fairness for students taking exams in 2021 and P-05-1055 Cancel GCSE and A level examinations**

The petitions (1025 and 1055) sought to ensure that students who would have examinations in 2021 were not disadvantaged due to the impact of Covid-19 on their education.

In January 2021 the Welsh Government confirmed that learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales will have their qualifications awarded through a Centre Determined Grade model rather than examinations.

**P-05-1118 Allow parents of under 1 year old to form a support bubble in new Tier 4 Covid restrictions**

The petition called for parents of new born babies or young children to be able to form an ‘extended household’ (commonly known as a support bubble) with another household during Coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

The restrictions were amended to allow for this in February 2021.

**P-05-1137 Call for fair funding for the National Library of Wales by the Welsh Government**

The petition raised concerns over planned cuts to the workforce and services at the National Library of Wales. During the Committee’s consideration of the petition, the Welsh Government announced additional funding for the Library in financial years 2020-21 and 2021-22 and intended to support key recommendations into its future sustainability.

## 4. Reflections for the Sixth Senedd

On the basis of our experience during this Senedd term, we have made several recommendations for the consideration of our successor committee and the next Senedd.

### Committee processes

Overall, we consider that the processes which support our work as a Committee have functioned well during the Fifth Senedd. We believe that it remains important for the Petitions Committee to consider all petitions referred to it and that securing a response from the Welsh Government, or another relevant body, prior to this has served to make this consideration both efficient and meaningful.

A key challenge is how the Committee should best manage the volume of petitions it receives in a way which enables it to carry out detailed scrutiny on issues of its choosing. We believe that it is important that the Committee seeks to identify those petitions on which it wishes to take further evidence or give more in depth consideration to at an early stage, as this is where it can add significant value to the petitions process.

To enable it to do so, there is a need to resolve other petitions in an efficient way. Closing petitions is rarely an easy decision, but doing so is important to ensure that the Committee's workload does not become overwhelming and so that Committee meetings do not become solely focused on processing correspondence. We also observe that the respective positions of the petitioner and the Government (or other body) are generally pretty clear at an early stage and that protracted exchanges of correspondence, especially when little progress is being made on the issue, can have little practical impact and be frustrating for those involved.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that our successor committee should consider at the outset how it intends to identify the petitions on which it wishes to undertake detailed scrutiny, and to resource its work in line with that.

**Recommendation 2.** Our successor committee should seek to resolve most petitions in a timely manner, both for the benefit of petitioners and to ensure that it has the time and capacity to conduct detailed scrutiny on issues of its choosing. If petition volumes are maintained, this will likely mean agreeing to take no further action on some petitions following their initial consideration.

## Time sensitive petitions

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The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a change to the type of petitions received since spring 2020. In particular, there has been a significant increase in the number of petitions calling for immediate action, such as changes to restrictions or calls for more support for specific businesses. These have prompted us to reflect on the process through which petitions are referred to us for consideration.

Under the Committee’s established processes, petitions are required to close for signatures before they can be considered. However, this can be problematic when immediate action is required but the closing date chosen by petitioners is some time in the future. It has resulted in a significant administrative burden for the staff supporting the petitions process and, on occasions, petitions being out-of-date by the time they are referred to us for consideration.

**Recommendation 3.** Based on our experience of considering time-sensitive petitions during the Covid-19 pandemic, we recommend that the next committee should give consideration to whether or not petitions should be referred to it at the first opportunity, even when they are still collecting signatures. This consideration should include whether this would cause practical difficulties and the impact that such a change would have on the administration of the petitions process.

## Signature thresholds

### Threshold for consideration of petitions

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The main threshold for petitions is 50 signatures. All petitions collecting this number are referred to the Committee for consideration and receive a response from the Welsh Government, or another decision-maker.

As discussed in section 1, the number of petitions received has increased significantly in the last 12 months and the extent to which this change will prove to be temporary or permanent is currently unclear. However, it is the case that the number of petitions to the Senedd had been steadily increasing before the combined impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and a new petitions website.

We have not done a detailed analysis of this issue. However, it is our view that the current 50 signature threshold is too low and results in some petitions being referred to the Petitions Committee which have not demonstrated substantial support. Whilst we believe that the petitions process should continue to be open and accessible, we are concerned that the low threshold has had an impact on

our ability to undertake detailed scrutiny on as many issues as we would have wished to.

We therefore recommend that the threshold should be reviewed by the next committee, alongside the issues referred to in recommendations 1 and 2. We suggest that a figure of 200 or 250 signatures may be justified on the basis of our experience and to ensure that the petitions referred for scrutiny can demonstrate a significant level of public support.

**Recommendation 4.** More detailed consideration should be given to whether the current 50 signature threshold for the consideration of petition remains appropriate, or whether it should be increased in the early part of the Sixth Senedd.

### Debate threshold

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Petitions with more than 10,000 signatures are considered for a debate during a Plenary meeting. Between the introduction of this threshold in March 2017 and 1 December 2020 this threshold was 5,000 set at signatures. As referred to in section 2, we pledged to review the impact of that change at the end of the Fifth Senedd.

In the four months the revised target has been in place six petitions have passed 10,000 signatures, indicating that it remains an achievable target. In contrast, 11 petitions received more than 5,000 signatures during the same time period.<sup>2</sup>

We believe that this change has helped to establish more realistic expectations about the capacity of the Senedd to debate petitions during Plenary meetings, and that avoiding false expectations about the prospect of a debate being held is in the interest of everyone involved.

The threshold should be set at a level at which it is reasonably attainable but does not set unrealistic expectations. We believe that direct Plenary debates on petitions are most impactful if they are relatively uncommon. Our view is also that it is in the interest of the majority of petitions to be scrutinised through committee work, where more detailed consideration can be given to the views of the petitioner(s) and the response from the Welsh Government or other decision-

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<sup>2</sup> For comparison purposes, 22 petitions had collected more than 5,000 signatures in the preceding four month period (August – November 2020), though this was affected by several petitioners closing their petitions early having been notified of the change in advance.

maker. A debate is best suited to circumstances in which an issue is high-profile and/or when a decision needs to be made or challenged quickly.

We consider that the practice that has been adopted recently, where the Chair or a Member of the Petitions Committee has contributed to debates in order to highlight relevant large petitions, should also be maintained as a way to ensure that greater numbers of petitions can be considered during Plenary proceedings.

However, we also note that the Coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a substantial increase in the use of the Senedd's petitions process and that it may become possible to reduce the number of signatures required in the future, should the number of petitions received reduce to something more like their previous levels.

We also consider that the Petitions Committee should retain discretion over which issues should be put forward for debate, i.e. a referral should not be automatic. There are a number of reasons why a debate may not be the most appropriate course of action, for example: the circumstances may already have changed; the issue may have been debated or considered in another way recently; or it may be better suited to detailed scrutiny by a committee. In addition, given that the ability to sign Senedd petitions is not restricted by location, we believe that it is reasonable for the number and proportion of signatures collected within Wales to be considered before a debate is requested.

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the threshold for considering debates on petitions should be maintained at 10,000 signatures and that the Petitions Committee should retain its discretion to determine which petitions are referred for a debate. We note that it may be possible for this threshold to be reduced in the future should the volume of petitioning reduce.