

Dyddiad | Date: 16 November 2021

Elin Jones MS

Chair, Business Committee

Senedd Cymru

CF99 1SN

Dear Business Committee

**Request for a change to standing order 23.4(i)**

I am writing to request a change to Standing order 23.4(i) which sets a threshold of 50 signatures for a petition to be considered by the Committee. After considering the recommendation of the predecessor committee and considering the marked increase in petitions activity since the introduction of our new petitions website in 2020, the Committee believes that 250 signatures would be a more suitable threshold for a petition to demonstrate it has sufficient support to be discussed in the national parliament.

The required change would be:

In Standing Order 23.4(i) delete 50 and replace with 250.

We believe that consideration of a petition in the national Parliament is a significant event. Where the Committee is asked to consider petitions and write to Ministers and other bodies seeking answers, we believe the petition should be able to demonstrate some level of popular support.

If Siambr time allows, we would like this change to take effect from 1 January 2022, so that all new petitions from the start of the year, would be subject to the new threshold.

I have attached further information to support our recommendation as an annex.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Sargeant". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long horizontal line that ends in an arrowhead pointing to the right.

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

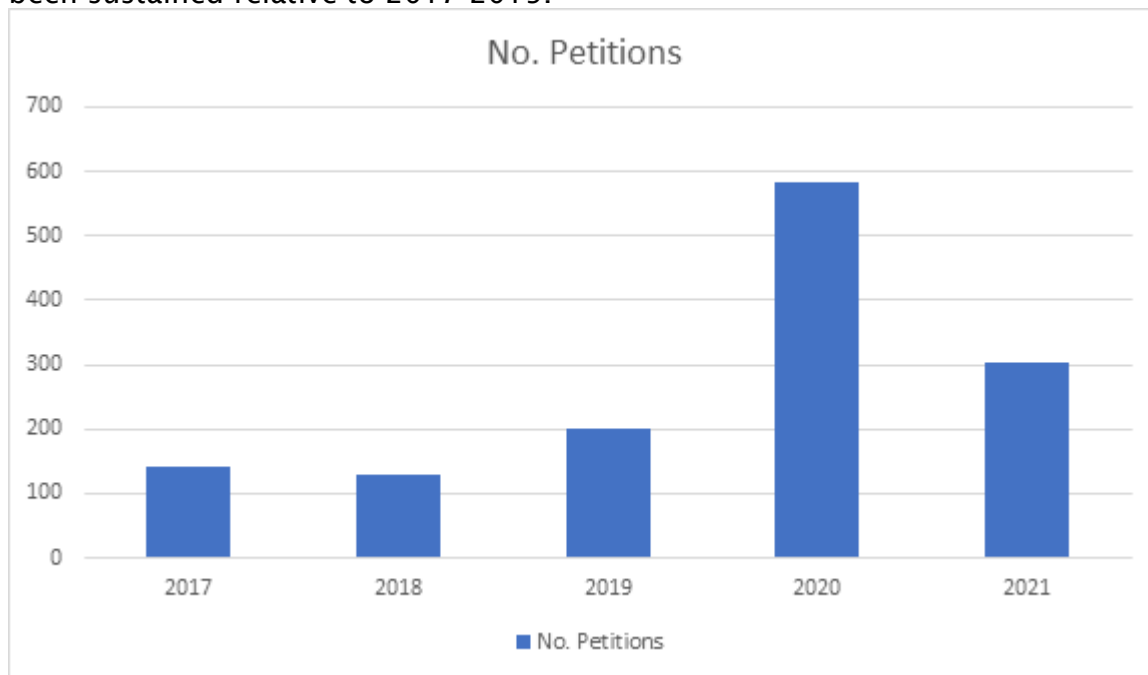
## Annex

### Background to the Committee's request

#### Why is the Committee proposing to raise the threshold for petitions to the Senedd?

The introduction of a new petitions website in April 2020 made it much easier for petitions to be created and signed – particularly from mobile devices. Consequently, the number of petitions meeting the current 50 signature threshold for consideration by the Committee has leapt up.

The unique circumstances of 2020 and the pandemic made it difficult to see whether the change was sustainable. But figures for the first 10 months of 2021 show that the increase has been sustained relative to 2017-2019.



This increase in the number of petitions submitted has increased the workload of the Committee, meaning there has been less time to focus on detailed scrutiny relating to petitions with the potential to make a difference.

#### What difference will changing the threshold make?

The Petitions Committee of the Sixth Senedd is keen to make a positive difference and improve the lives of people in Wales. To do that we plan to give more time to petitions that could lead to change. Consequently, we sometimes have to make difficult choices, so that we have the resources to be proactive where we see a potential to make a difference.

#### Why didn't this change happen when the threshold for a debate was changed?

The predecessor Committee raised the threshold for consideration for a Senedd debate from 5,000 to 10,000 in response to the rising popularity of petitions. That committee's legacy report recommended raising the entry threshold saying that "200 or 250 signatures may be justified...to ensure that petitions referred for scrutiny can demonstrate a significant level of public support." However, the Committee decided that it was unclear at that stage to what degree the increase in petitioning activity was the result of the Covid-19 pandemic and agreed to defer taking action until more information was available.

#### Would a lower threshold still achieve the Committee's aim?

The Committee considered this, but decided that a smaller increase now would risk needing further rises relatively soon. As changing the threshold requires a change to Standing Orders,

we wanted to make a change that would put petitions on a sustainable footing for the whole Sixth Senedd term.

Raising the threshold from 50 to 100 would not make much difference to the Committee's ability to give more time to petitions with potential. 80% of petitions over the last year have reached 100 signatures (and we believe more than 90% would reach that number if petitioners had an incentive to get the extra signatures).

The 'average' petition currently gets more than 300 signatures - with the really popular ones reaching tens of thousands.

At 250 signatures, more than 56% of petitions over the last year would still be considered. This would still be a greater number of petitions than were dealt with by the predecessor in Committee in 2017 or 2018, and very close to the 2019 figure.

ENDS

