



# Cross-Party Groups

## A RESPONSE FROM WCVA

1. [Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#) (WCVA) is the national membership body for voluntary organisations in Wales. Our purpose is to enable voluntary organisations to make a bigger difference together.
2. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Standards of Conduct Committee's consultation on Cross-Party groups. Many voluntary sector organisations are involved in the work of Cross-Party Groups, including as the secretariat or as attendees. They play a key role in ensuring they are functioning.

## WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CROSS-PARTY GROUPS IN THE SENEDD?

3. Cross-Party Groups can and should be a valuable forum for sharing expert insight and having informed cross-party, cross-sector debate on key issues, giving those attending an opportunity to influence the thinking of Members of the Senedd. In the best cases, they are exactly that.
4. Whilst we have heard reports of voluntary sector organisations having some minor problems with CPGs, as discussed below. However, others have said they have no issues at all with current arrangements. This leads us to believe there is no inherent problem with CPGs across the board; rather there is simply a need for more consistency in arrangements. This would allow all CPGs to work effectively.

## HAVE YOU ANY CONCERNS OR ENCOUNTERED ANY PROBLEMS WITH THE ARRANGEMENTS? IF SO, WHAT?

5. It would be useful if CPG Secretariats (which often includes voluntary sector organisations) were given a little more autonomy from CPG Chairs. Currently, all arrangements – for example, approving memberships or booking meeting rooms and IT – must be made through the Chair's office. In many cases, this works acceptably. However, this can be cumbersome and take a long time to make decisions, and reply to Secretariats with permission to go ahead with the next stage of organisation. This then becomes frustrating and dispiriting for the Secretariat. It would be helpful if Secretariats were able to organise affairs independently, with perhaps only a final sign-off from the Chair to approve actions. For example, registered secretariats could book a room and seek subsequent approval, perhaps within seven days, from the Chair.

6. There is little consistency in making links between CPGs at present. This potentially results in duplication of effort and missed opportunities for sharing of ideas.
7. There are some CPG pages on the Senedd website that are out of date, listing members who are no longer in the Senedd or giving the wrong secretariat information. We would suggest that the Senedd and Secretariats work together to ensure timely updating of information in order to improve transparency. The ability to contact the secretariat should be included, even if this is through a contact form rather than by publishing email addresses if that it is what is preferred.

## **DO THE CURRENT RULES REFLECT THE FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CROSS-PARTY GROUPS AS YOU UNDERSTAND THEM?**

8. CPGs have a vastly different range of interest and ways of working, which often leads to different roles for CPGs and their members. As a result, it is not clear to the voluntary sector what the exact function of any CPG is intended to be. Some have expected CPGs to act essentially as sub-committees. A steer from the Senedd Committee about what exactly they would like CPGs to do and achieve would be invaluable. This statement should be communicated clearly to all CPG members and displayed on the Senedd website. This will help get CPGs the right membership and ensure that members have the correct expectations of their role.
9. With reference to the above point, we have heard reports of outside members sitting on these groups without being able to fully play a role effectively. This is not necessarily the fault of the members in questions, but rather one or both of the following:
  - Unclear Standing Orders that do not effectively communicate the structure and procedures of a group
  - a failure in communication between the member and the CPG about the purpose of the CPG and what would be expected of the outside member

These members may have put considerable resource into preparing for these group meetings. Clarity as the role of CPGs would prevent such wasted effort. Whilst each CPG will likely to continue to operate in its own manner, requiring standing orders and a mission statement, and publishing these, would be useful.

## **ARE THERE ANY FURTHER STEPS THAT COULD BE TAKEN TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY FOR CROSS-PARTY GROUPS? IF SO, WHAT?**

10. Minutes of meetings should continue to be published on the Senedd website in a timely manner.
11. We have noticed that there are no minutes published for a number of CPGs. If there have not been meetings of these particular CPGs, and therefore no minutes produced, this should be stated. If there have been meetings, these minutes should be published as soon as possible.

David Cook

Policy Officer, WCVA

August 2022

[dcook@wcva.cymru](mailto:dcook@wcva.cymru)