# Calls grow for independent bullying complaints process in Welsh Parliament amid rising reports



Calls for an independent process to handle complaints of bullying and harassment in the Welsh Parliament have gathered significant steam, driven by mounting criticism of the existing procedures that remain mired in self-regulation. This inadequate oversight has raised serious questions about fairness and accountability.

In her recent testimony to the Senedd's standards committee, Jane Runeckles, a representative of the FDA trade union, drew attention to these critical shortcomings. The current model, which allows politicians to assess their own conduct, has left many staff members feeling disheartened and hesitant to come forward. "Providing a fully independent avenue as the first port of call would greatly enhance confidence in the system," she asserted. Her words echo a rising demand for reform, as the notion of politicians “marking their own homework” is increasingly seen as unacceptable.

The demand for independence in the complaints process is underscored by comparisons to measures retrospectively applied at Westminster in light of significant bullying and harassment allegations there. Five years ago, Westminster established an Independent Expert Panel to handle such complaints, a step many in Wales now look to emulate. Runeckles advocates for an independent panel of experts to directly recommend actions to the Senedd, sidestepping the standards committee—a body many perceive as biased.

The urgency for reform is stark, exemplified by recent data showing a staggering 104% increase in complaints reported to the Senedd’s standards commissioner over the past year. Critics argue that the new six-month limit for filing complaints may further silence victims, contrasting sharply with Westminster's more lenient policies, which permit a year for bullying complaints and impose no deadline for allegations of sexual misconduct. Runeckles voiced alarm that “historic complaints” risk being dismissed under the current six-month restriction, calling for a more flexible approach that validates victims’ experiences.

Amplifying these concerns, Hannah Stevens, chief executive of Elect Her—a group focused on empowering women in politics—also champions the establishment of a fully independent process. Unions and advocacy groups, including Unite and Race Council Cymru, have also thrown their support behind this initiative, emphasizing the pressing need for a robust framework that genuinely supports staff while upholding standards of dignity and respect.

At present, complaints are managed by Douglas Bain, the Senedd’s standards commissioner, before reaching the standards committee. While this process is purportedly impartial, it has deterred some former staff members from making formal complaints. One ex-staff member disclosed to BBC Wales that they refrained from filing a complaint due to fears of being labeled “the problem.” Such accounts underline the critical need for a comprehensive overhaul of the system to guarantee that all individuals feel safe and empowered to report misconduct without fear of reprisal.

The growing clamor for an independent complaints procedure in the Senedd reflects a larger demand for accountability and transparency within political institutions. As advocates continue their relentless push for change, the response to these cries could be a pivotal moment in how allegations of bullying and harassment are handled in Welsh politics, paving the way for a more secure and equitable environment for all staff. In the face of a new Labour administration, it is paramount that the Welsh Parliament addresses these issues with urgency and commitment, rather than allowing the status quo to persist.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25210873.senedd-calls-independent-process-bullying-claims/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.fda.org.uk/news/fda-calls-on-senedd-to-implement-fully-independent-process-for-dealing-with-complaints-of-bullying-harassment-and-sexual-harassment/> - The FDA Cymru|Wales has called for the Senedd to establish a fully independent process for handling complaints of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment against Members of the Senedd (MSs). This call was part of their written evidence to the Standards of Conduct Committee's 'Inquiry into dignity and respect'. The FDA argues that an independent process is vital to ensure staff feel confident that their complaints will be investigated fairly and free from political interference. They also point to the Independent Expert Panel established in Westminster as a model for such a process.
3. <https://www.fda.org.uk/news/the-senedd-needs-a-fully-independent-policy-for-dealing-with-bullying-and-harassment/> - FDA Wales has submitted evidence to the Senedd’s Standards of Conduct Committee’s consultation on Procedures for Dealing with Complaints against Members of the Senedd. The FDA argues that the current procedures fall short of the fully independent process for dealing with complaints put in place at Westminster following Dame Laura Cox’s inquiry into bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff. They believe it is vital that the Senedd should have a robust policy to deal with complaints against elected officials that is broadly comparable to an employer’s disciplinary policy.
4. <https://www.fda.org.uk/news/the-senedd-needs-a-new-independent-process-for-complaints-against-members/> - FDA Cymru|Wales is calling for a truly independent process to deal with complaints about the conduct of Members of the Senedd. The latest report from the Senedd Standards Commissioner for the year to March 2021 shows a 104% increase in complaints. The union has called for the Senedd to introduce a process mirroring that now in place in the House of Commons, including an Independent Expert Panel, with the authority to make decisions on investigation outcomes and sanctions on upheld complaints.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-62207011> - The time limit for staff to make complaints about the behaviour of Senedd members has been halved. The parliament's standards committee now says complaints should be made within six months. Delayed complaints may be considered if the standards commissioner believes there was a 'good reason' for the delay. A union said the change must not be used to 'wipe the slate clean for bullies'. The FDA, which represents Senedd commission staff, said there must be a 'window of opportunity' for historic complaints to be made and called for an independent process similar to Westminster.
6. <https://senedd.wales/help/complaints/dignity-and-respect-guidance/> - The Senedd's Dignity and Respect Policy outlines the procedures for making complaints related to dignity and respect. Complaints against Members of the Senedd are investigated by the independent Senedd Commissioner for Standards under the Code of Conduct. For staff employed by Members of the Senedd, complaints are carried out under established Grievance procedures. For staff employed by the Senedd Commission, complaints are carried out under established Grievance procedures agreed in partnership with trade unions.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz5jyrjje48o> - A former Senedd staff member who claimed to have been bullied by a politician has said they did not make a formal complaint because 'it's not worth it'. Speaking to BBC Wales, the staff member said they felt they would be 'seen as the problem' if they complained to the Senedd's behaviour watchdog, the standards commissioner. Their comments come following significant concerns from parties and unions about the complaints system for harassment and bullying in the Welsh Parliament. Calls have been made for a more independent process, similar to what exists in Westminster.