



Northern Ireland  
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## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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# Designing Consultations for Sensitive Policy Issues: Insights from Other Jurisdictions

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This briefing note explores how other jurisdictions design consultations and engagement on sensitive policy issues, highlighting key themes of engagement with victims, survivors and others with lived experience.

This information is provided to Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in support of their duties, and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as professional legal advice, or as a substitute for it.

## Introduction

This briefing note is in response to a request by the Committee for the Executive Office to provide further information into designing consultations for sensitive policy issues. It is useful to consider this note in conjunction with the previous Research and Information Service (RaISe) paper entitled 'Trauma-informed Approaches' from May 2025<sup>1</sup>.

### **Note on confidentiality of some sources**

RaISe consulted with colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, House of Commons, Oireachtas and Aotearoa New Zealand. Their assistance in researching this paper was hugely appreciated. Much of the information shared was provided in confidence and is not publicly available. As a result, this paper presents key themes identified across jurisdictions, along with a case study.

The approaches described are not necessarily standard processes, but rather examples of how different legislatures have engaged with victims, survivors and others with lived experience - both in Calls for Evidence and as part of Inquiries.

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<sup>1</sup> RaISe, ['Trauma-informed Approaches'](#), NIAR 114-2025.

# 1 Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from discussions with individuals in various jurisdictions. Contributors highlighted these areas as particularly important when designing consultations on sensitive policy issues:

## 1.1 Accessibility of Call for Evidence Documents

- **Proactive provision of alternative formats:** Contributors highlighted the importance of providing different versions of Committees' Calls for Evidence, without requiring individuals to request them. Common formats included Easy Read, British or other sign languages as well as translations into minority or heritage languages (for example, te reo Māori, Gaelic and Scots).
- **Accepting submissions in any language:** Some jurisdictions made clear that written responses were welcomed in any language, including sign language formats.

## 1.2 Flexible Response Options

- **Tailoring submission formats to the audience:** Many Committees offered options for different written submissions:
  - A formal version designed primarily for organisations and policy professionals with more technical expertise to comment on specific clauses of a Bill.
  - A short, accessible version - often a survey designed for individuals, including survivors with lived experience, to provide more general thoughts on a Bill. These frequently used tick boxes with limited open text space to allow for more focused responses.

## 1.3 Clarity of Purpose and Process

- **Explaining the Committee's role:** It was seen as important to highlight a Committee's role in the Bill process by ensuring it is clear that it is there to scrutinise a Bill, rather than be a space to hear oral testimony of lived experience or to provide emotional support/guidance. Clarity around this

helped to manage expectations, prevent potential re-traumatisation and ensure evidence was used appropriately for scrutiny purposes.

- **Being clear about what the Committee can and cannot do:** Being upfront about the Committee's remit helped build trust and ensured that those engaging understood the boundaries of the process.
- **Explaining the legislative process:** This was important to do alongside outlining the Committee's role so that victims and survivors understand what the next steps will be. Videos were an effective way to clearly explain the process.
- **Identifying who the Committee are:** Not just the Membership of the Committee but explaining that the Committee are not the Government. It was often highlighted that it was important to be mindful of where victims and survivors may have come into contact with State institutions before and that these may have been negative experiences.

#### 1.4 Ethical Handling of Submissions

- **Outlining how submissions will be handled:** This helped victims and survivors to understand that it may be necessary to redact their submissions, for example if the personal details of others, such as siblings, had been shared without consent.

#### 1.5 Support and Communication

- **Signposting support services:** Across communications, including on the Call for Evidence webpage and other Committee information which is made public.
- **Providing information through different channels:** Most Committee information was disseminated through digital channels, but it was highlighted that other options should be made available and considered. For example, by using sign language interpreters, posting videos and sending information by post.

## 2 Case Study: Scottish Parliament

### 2.1 Case Example: The Education, Children and Young People Committee

The Scottish Parliament's then Education and Skills Committee (now the Education, Children and Young People Committee), used a trauma-informed approach when scrutinising the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021<sup>2</sup>.

Their engagement with victims and survivors involved:

- Recruiting a Committee advisor who had worked with two survivor groups to advise on the Committee's approach. Officials reported that this led to improved trust in the process.
- Choosing to use the term 'victim/survivor' in reports/correspondence in recognition of how different people wanted to be described.
- Communicating clearly with victim/survivor groups, in recognition that some victims/survivors had disrupted periods at school.
- Clarifying the Committee's role from the outset – as one of legislative scrutiny rather than emotional support and guidance to victims/survivors.
- Signposting to support services in all Committee communications.
- Working in partnership with organisations representing survivors, rather than asking individual victims/survivors to present to the Committee.
- Offering a choice to victims/survivors on whether to present in public or private when giving evidence.
- Clarifying the independence by explaining to victims/survivors that the Committee did not represent the Scottish Government.
- Giving 'careful consideration' to how written submissions were handled. Particularly where a description of abuse could potentially implicate others (i.e. siblings who were mentioned in submissions). When information needed to be redacted, agreement was sought with the victim/survivor.

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<sup>2</sup> RaISe, ['Trauma-informed Approaches'](#), NIAR 114-2025 p38.

- Drafting an Easy Read summary for victims/survivors who gave evidence, to show how their contribution had made a difference.
- Explaining the legislative process in simple terms, so they knew what the expected timelines and next steps would be. A video explaining the process helped with this. This maintained trust in the process and reduced potential misunderstandings<sup>3</sup>.

The Education and Skills Committee (ESC) also included information on support services on their web pages and published their Stage 1 report in an Easy Read format<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.2 Accessible Call for Evidence Processes

Scottish Parliament Committees also consider the need for further alternative versions of the Call for Evidence (or Call for Views as they are known). This may include proactively producing;

- Easy Read versions
- British Sign Language (BSL) versions.
- Translations into Gaelic, Scots, or other languages

For example, during the consideration of the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill in 2022, the Committee provided an Easy Read version, a short survey and a BSL version. Written submissions were accepted in English, Gaelic, Scots, BSL or any other language<sup>5</sup>.

Committees may also consider whether to allow different types of written evidence. For example, the Call for Views for the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill in 2024 offered both a short, accessible survey for general feedback and a detailed submission for people, groups, bodies or

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<sup>3</sup> RaISe, [‘Trauma-informed Approaches’](#), NIAR 114-2025 pp38-39.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Parliament, Education and Skills Committee, [Redress for Survivors \(Historical Child Abuse in Care\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#), webpage archived March 2024 and viewed June 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Parliament, Education Children and Young People Committee, [Disabled Children and Young People \(Transitions to Adulthood\) \(Scotland\) Bill – detailed call for views](#) 2022.

organisations who wished to comment on specific aspects of the Bill. Easy Read and BSL formats were available and other accessible formats could be requested<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Parliament, [Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults \(Scotland\) Bill - Sharing your views](#), 2024, accessed June 2025.