



John Griffiths, MS
Chair
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

12 May 2020

Dear John,

Further to my letter of 23 April regarding the temporary suspension of Stage 2 scrutiny of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, I am grateful to the Committee for agreeing to this proposal.

It was important that the General Principles' debate and financial resolution could proceed on the 8 April as it has enabled us to continue to include future work on the Bill in our planning for matters that we will want to be ready to progress when the COVID 19 situation permits. My officials, including those in the Bill Team, are currently very busy dealing with emergency legislation, supporting local government and considering measures that might be required to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. The Bill lawyers have been involved in developing both the main coronavirus regulations and local government specific legislation, as well as numerous other matters related to the COVID 19 response. This has impacted on the development of amendments to the Bill, and consequently the scheduling of Stage 2. I also recognise the importance of the Committee being able to focus its immediate activities on scrutiny of the response to COVID 19.

As I have previously advised the Committee, officials have been engaging extensively with the WLGA, representatives from local government and the third sector through the networks available in respect of planning for implementation of the Bill. At present these stakeholders are also working on the response to the pandemic. This engagement work will therefore recommence at an appropriate time.

I have already indicated the Government will not now introduce amendments relating to prisoner voting at Stage 2. I very much regret being unable to take forward the recommendations of this Committee in relation to prisoner voting, but I accept it is not possible in the current circumstances. I have also been carefully considering the content of the Bill, and whether to continue progressing some previously planned amendments, or not retain other provisions within the Bill. In addition, the Government has also identified

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learning from the response to the pandemic, such as in relation to remote meetings, which it would be beneficial to incorporate into the Bill.

I can therefore now confirm that, in addition to the proposed prisoner voting amendments, I will not be progressing with Stage 2 amendments to provide for the suspension of remuneration where members are unable to act and will not be progressing with provisions dealing with executive governance arrangements in relation to elected mayors. These are complex areas of law and each amendment needs very careful consideration in order to avoid unintended consequences. With Legal Services' resource currently focussed on COVID 19 related legislation sufficient resource is not available to give these matters the detailed and extensive attention they require.

Taking into account all of the Committees' comments and recommendations, I intend to bring forward amendments to remove the existing provisions in respect of the Welsh Ministers' power to establish an all-Wales database of electoral registration information and the Welsh Ministers' discretion to introduce election pilot schemes from the Bill. I will also bring forward amendments to implement a number of the Committees' recommendations and a number of amendments which are technical in nature.

The Committee will be aware of the modifications made by the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020, which deals with remote attendance for local government bodies including community councils, Fire and Rescue Authorities and National Park Authorities. These have been welcomed by stakeholders and it is my intention to seek to make these changes on a permanent basis, through amendment to the Bill, though time constraints may mean this will be at Stage 3.

I note that Business Committee has considered our proposals for a revised timetable and referred it to the Committee for a view. I would suggest that in light of the action outlined above to reduce the number of Government amendments to the Bill, the Committee's consideration of the Stage 2 amendments could potentially be managed in one day.

I look forward to progressing the Bill with the Committee in the autumn.

Yours sincerely,



Julie James AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government