

Elin Jones MS

Y Llywydd

1 June 2020

Annwyl Lywydd,

Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform

As you know, the Senedd has tasked the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform with examining the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform and reporting on our findings. I am writing to update you on how we intend to complete our work in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We believe that in these extraordinary times the energy, time and resources of the Senedd and its committees, the Welsh Government, and public bodies and organisations across Wales should be focused primarily on responding to the ongoing public health emergency.

We welcome the fact that, with the support of the Senedd Commission, the Senedd, its Members and its committees have been able to adapt swiftly, and continue to undertake our important scrutiny, legislative and representative work on behalf of the people and communities of Wales. Nevertheless, we recognise that operating remotely places certain constraints on the time available to Senedd committees to undertake their business, in particular on the capacity for meetings to be broadcast publicly. All committees have had to reconsider their priorities, and focus their attention on those aspects of their remits most critically-affected by COVID-19. Our view is that within the limited time available to Senedd committees, priority for meeting time should be afforded to those committees at the forefront of the Senedd's response to the pandemic. We will not, therefore, be seeking to hold formal oral evidence sessions before the summer recess.

At the heart of our strategic approach to our remit has been the need to provide accessible and accurate information to the public, and to listen to their informed views. However, we have had to reconsider the extent to which this remains achievable in the current context. As you will be aware, the citizens' assembly methodology is well-established and well-respected as a mechanism for careful and informed deliberation and for developing consensus on sensitive, complex and



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controversial matters. For this reason, throughout our work we have placed significant priority on holding a citizens' assembly to enable a representative group of people from across Wales to come together to learn about, discuss and reach consensus on matters relating to the Senedd's capacity. We remain convinced of the importance of robust, deliberative public engagement on the size of the legislature and how Members are elected, but have reluctantly concluded that the current circumstances mean that it is not possible for us to continue with the procurement of a citizens' assembly.

While we may not be able to progress our work in quite the way we had planned, the issues within our remit remain of fundamental constitutional significance. The evidence that we have already gathered has led us to be concerned about the extent to which a 60-Member Senedd will have the capacity it needs to fulfil its responsibilities to the people of Wales between now and 2026. I would like to assure you, therefore, that we do intend to complete our task and report to the Senedd.

While we have had to adjust the way in which we will approach the remainder of our work, we do intend to seek further written evidence to inform our deliberations and the preparation of our final report. We will also keep under review the potential to take further formal oral evidence on the matters of highest priority, should it be appropriate and proportionate to do so in the early autumn. In this way, we hope that our report will usefully inform future considerations about how we can ensure that the Senedd is an institution with the capacity it needs to work with and for the people and communities of Wales as we seek to recover from the devastating impact of COVID-19.

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Bowden MS
Chair, Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

