



Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair
Petitions Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Seneddpetitions@senedd.wales

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Dear Chair

I am writing in response to your letter of 30 November about a petition regarding the May 2021 Senedd election.

At the outset, I reiterate that our firm intention is for the election to be held as scheduled on 6 May 2021. As a responsible government we must, however prepare for a range of scenarios in the event that the pandemic poses a serious threat to public health and it is not safe to hold the election at that time.

We therefore established the Elections Planning Group, with representatives from all political parties, to consider legislative adjustments that may be required to respond to the public health position and to protect the safety and wellbeing of all involved in the election. The group's report was debated in the Senedd on 17 November. In the debate, I set out our intention to bring forward a Bill to include provisions that would enable the Llywydd to postpone the election if necessary because of the prevalence of coronavirus.

Similar legislation has been laid in Scotland.

In response to the specific points made in the petition text, the right to vote is not being removed and the decision to postpone would not be for the Welsh Government. Any decision to seek postponement would need the agreement of two-thirds of Members of the Senedd, meaning all Members would have a role in the decision on any delay. The ultimate decision would be the Llywydd's to take.

There is already a legal power to postpone a Senedd election by up to a month, which is at the discretion of the Llywydd and is subject to Royal Proclamation.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400
YP.PrifWeinidog@llyw.cymru • ps.firstminister@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Any decision to defer the election will be determined in Wales by the Members of the Senedd, but there will clearly be some read across between decisions taken by the UK Government about elections in England and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in England and Wales.

If the UK Government was to decide – on the basis of scientific advice about the progress of the pandemic and of the vaccination effort – to postpone the PCC elections we would have to be able to demonstrate to the Welsh electorate why we took a different view and that proceeding with the Senedd elections in the same circumstances would be the right thing to do.

We are aware from the experiences of recent months how quickly coronavirus can accelerate. It would therefore be irresponsible for us not to make contingency plans for the election in May.

The measures we have proposed will enable the Llywydd to decide, as a final resort, whether to postpone the date of the election to a time when it is safer for people to vote if the public health situation has not improved significantly by May.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD