

Reject proposed 36 extra Members of the Senedd by 2026

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 05 Rhagfyr 2022
Petitions Committee | 05 December 2022

Reference: SR22/4474/1

Petition Number: P-06-1305

Petition title: Reject proposed 36 extra Members of the Senedd by 2026

Text of petition: Labour and Plaid Cymru propose to extend the present 60 MS to 96 members by 2026. This is a waste of more public money where it can be better used on public services, such as better funding for local councils. With the ongoing cost of living crisis this will result in more waste of public money with the cost of employing 36 members and support staff. I think a vote on this by the Welsh people would be a better idea of democracy at work.

With cost of living affecting people across society I find the proposal of the extra 36 abhorrent. Public money should be spent on care, councils, supporting local economies and helping people across the whole of Wales.

The people deserve a voice on this issue, and I can only hope enough sign to bring enough pressure to reconsider their plans and think of the people of Wales.



1. Background

Since 2004, a series of reports have recommended that the size of the Senedd should increase from its current size of 60 Members. The [Wales Act 2017](#) gave the Senedd powers over its size and electoral arrangements. Any Bill introduced on Senedd Reform requires a supermajority (40 of the Senedd's 60 Members) to pass. [Section 64 of the Government of Wales Act 2006](#) gives the Welsh Government the power to hold a poll to ascertain the views of the people of Wales relating to functions of the Welsh Ministers. This is not a mechanism for a direct vote or direct referendum on a particular proposal.

1.1. Expert Panel on Electoral Reform

In February 2017, the Llywydd and Assembly Commission appointed an [Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform](#) to examine whether the Assembly needed more members to fulfil its scrutiny and legislative functions.

The Expert Panel recommended that the Assembly increase in size to at “least 80, and preferably closer to 90, Members”. It found that a 60 Member legislature was small compared to most similar legislatures, and that Members’ time was severely limited due to a lack of capacity.

1.2. Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform

Following the findings of the Expert Panel, the [Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform](#) (CSER) was established to examine options for Senedd reform. The CSER published its findings in September 2020. It recommended that the Senedd should increase in size to between 80 and 90 Members with effect from the 2026 election. It also recommended that [the Single-transferable vote \(STV\)](#) electoral system be used. The Conservative Party did not put forward a Member for the Committee. The Committee was also disrupted by Brexit Party Member, David Rowlands, [resigning](#) before it had concluded its work, as well as by the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.3. The Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform

The [Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform](#) was established in October 2021, tasked with making recommendations for policy instructions for a Welsh Government Bill on Senedd reform.

The Special Purpose Committee recommended that the Senedd increase in size to 96 Members. It recommended that a closed list proportional representation system be introduced, and 16 new constituencies be created by pairing together existing UK Parliamentary constituencies. The Committee also said the new Senedd should include gender quotas, improved measures around collecting candidate diversity data and procedures for job sharing.

The Conservative representative on the Committee resigned before the Committee's report was agreed. Some of the key recommendations were agreed by a majority on the Committee but not by all Members.

2. Welsh Government action

The First Minister, Mark Drakeford, and the leader of Plaid Cymru, Adam Price, issued a joint statement on 10 May 2022, arguing that the Senedd should have 96 Members and should be elected using a closed list proportional system.

In the Welsh Government's response to this petition, the First Minister said:

“the Senedd is currently the smallest of all the devolved legislatures in the UK and has remained the same size since the establishment of the National Assembly in 1999, despite assuming extra law-making and tax-raising powers. In addition, when the UK left the EU, Wales lost its MEPs, and there are proposals for Wales to see a cut in the number of MPs from 40 to 32 under current boundary review plans.

It is essential that the Senedd has appropriate capacity to carry out its role in holding the government to account.”

The Welsh Government will bring forward a Senedd Reform Bill in due course, which will then be debated and scrutinised in the Senedd.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Senedd debated the Special Purpose Committee's report on 8 June 2022. The Chair of the Committee, Huw Irranca-Davies, said:

“there is no one single unadulterated perfect package of electoral reform that will satisfy everyone. [...] Our committee set out [...] to find proposals that must win support across the whole Senedd, not to seek some vision of perfection, and thereby sacrifice practicality and delivery by 2026.”

Mr Irranca-Davies said that the Senedd needed more capacity to meet additional responsibilities taken on since the Assembly was first established in 1999. These include primary law-making powers, tax-varying and borrowing powers, additional work created as powers return from the EU post-Brexit, heightened public awareness of the Senedd's responsibilities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the "not-unrealistic potential of additional future responsibilities".

Shadow Minister for Constitution, Darren Millar, criticised the proposals, arguing that it was not the right time for an increase in the size of the Senedd. Plaid Cymru's spokesperson for the constitution, Rhys ab Owen, argued that a larger Senedd was necessary to "scrutinise the Welsh Government more effectively and more efficiently".

The Senedd **voted in favour** of the motion to accept the recommendations of the Special Purpose Committee's report, with 40 Members voting for the proposals and 14 voting against. This met the requirements for a 'supermajority' of two thirds of the Senedd to allow a Bill on Senedd reform to be introduced.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.