



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1355
Ein cyf/Our ref FM -/00393/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair
Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
petitions@senedd.wales

22 August 2023

Dear Jack,

I am writing regarding petition P-06-1355 to “Hold a referendum seeking approval from the people to increase Assembly Members by 36”.

A commitment to Senedd reform was included in the manifestos of Welsh Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Liberal Democrat political parties at the 2021 Senedd election.

The Wales Act 2017 devolved powers in relation to Senedd elections, including the electoral system, conduct, franchise and registration. This included power for the Senedd to legislate to change its size, and without requirement for a referendum to take place prior to the use of such power.¹ Similarly, a referendum has not been required in the reduction of Wales’s MPs from 40 to 32, as a result of boundary reform changes being introduced in Westminster.

A clear and compelling case for Senedd reform has been repeatedly made in a series of expert panel and commission reports. In 2004, the Richards Commission ([Report of the Commission on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements of the National Assembly for Wales](#)) concluded that maintaining the status quo was not an option and recommended a change in membership and electoral system.

In 2017, the [Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform](#) (the McAllister Report) made recommendations about the size of the Senedd and how Members should be elected. Its recommendations were subsequently considered by the [Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform](#), which reported in September 2020, and concluded that there was clear and compelling evidence that the Senedd is too small. The committee outlined that the majority

¹ By contrast s.A1(3) of GoWA, also inserted by the Wales Act 2017, includes explicit provision that the Senedd (and Welsh Government) cannot be abolished without a referendum.

of the evidence it had heard “expressed concern over whether a 60-member Senedd has sufficient capacity to fulfil its responsibilities effectively”.

The Senedd’s Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform published its report [*Reforming our Senedd: A stronger voice for the people of Wales*](#) in May 2022. Among its 31 recommendations, was the recommendation that the Senedd should have 96 Members.

The Senedd is 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. The National Assembly, at that time, had no primary law-making powers and was not formally separated from the Welsh Government. The roles and responsibilities of the Senedd have grown considerably. The Senedd now makes laws, sets taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account in some of the areas which have the greatest impact on people’s lives. It makes decisions which affect the lives of every single person in Wales. It is essential that it is appropriately sized to be able to effectively carry out its scrutiny functions and hold the Government to account.

Investing in our democracy has a cost attached to it. The Welsh Government will publish detailed cost estimates alongside the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill. Members of the Senedd and the public will have an opportunity to consider both the detail of the legislation and associated costs when the Bill is introduced early in the autumn term.

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

MARK DRAKEFORD