

Mick Antoniw AS/MS
Y Cwnsler Cyffredinol a Gweinidog y Cyfansoddiad
Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref: CG/PO/361/2023

David Rees MS,
Chair
Llywydd's Committee
Senedd Cymru

seneddLLC@Senedd.Wales

24 October 2023

Dear David,

Thank you for your letters of 3 October to myself and the Minister for Finance and Local Government, regarding the Electoral Commission's supplementary financial estimate for 2023-24 and funding proposals for 2024-25 relating to its work on devolved Welsh elections. I am replying as the Minister responsible for elections, but I am copying this letter to the Minister for Finance and Local Government given her interest in expenditure out of the Welsh Consolidated Fund and in the administration of elections by local authorities.

The Electoral Commission is a valued partner for outreach and engagement work. We have been particularly encouraged by the Electoral Commission's commitment to producing education resources that work specifically to support the Curriculum for Wales. We look forward to working with them further as they roll these out to schools and will support them with their efforts. We know stakeholders in electoral services teams across Wales greatly value the communication resources produced by the Electoral Commission and we are pleased to see these resources will continue to be developed in the coming year. As with our Democratic Engagement Grant, we support the Electoral Commission continuing its awareness-raising and registration work in years without a devolved election.

With regards to the 2022-23 performance measures, we note the shortfall in meeting Strategic objective 1.1 (public awareness campaign influence on voter registration) and the action to use insights from this to inform future campaign planning. With regards to 1.2 (engagement with local authorities) it would be interesting to understand the level of engagement as a result of the 18 roll-call editions and to understand if all 22 local authorities are using the resources. Similarly with 1.3 there isn't enough detail to assess whether this has been successful.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Mick.Antoniw@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Mick.Antoniw@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.

Regarding strategic objectives 1.2 and 1.3, it may be helpful for the Electoral Commission to consider adding more detail to the targets and whether these should be quantitative or qualitative. A numerical value may not be sufficient to assess whether success has been achieved and qualitative reporting through a short engagement report, including available numerical measures, case studies, and explanatory resources may be more insightful against this objective.

I can confirm the activities described by the Electoral Commission in the supplementary estimate for 2023-24 are in line with the Welsh Government's expectations and is affordable within the funds transferred from HMT. However, I would highlight previous assurances made by the Commission that realistic pay assumptions were already included in the substantive estimate for 23-24. I expect this is a point you already plan to raise in your scrutiny of the in-year supplementary budget request at your 7 November meeting.

Similarly, I note the estimate presented for 2024-25 represents a further increase of £244,000 on the current year's funding, or an almost 33% increase compared with the previous five year plan. Given a negative consequential at the 2021 Spending Review in relation to Electoral Commission funding, the figure requested by the Commission for 2024-25 is in excess of the funding transferred by UK Government for Commission expenditure.

As a point of context for the consideration of both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 budgets, the First Minister and Minister for Finance and Local Government wrote in August to the Llywydd and the Chair of the Finance Committee setting out the significant economic and fiscal challenges already identified in the current financial year and that Wales's current financial settlement falls far short of what is needed to meet these challenges from existing budgets that have been eroded by a range of inflationary pressures.

Current statements from the UK Government clearly indicate that pay awards must be managed within existing settlements for Whitehall Departments and there will be no consequential funding being made available for Wales. As a result, Welsh Government is having to make difficult budgetary choices to absorb pay awards from within its existing budget, the in-year consequences of which were set out by the Minister for Finance and Local Government on 18 October. Other bodies funded from the Welsh Consolidated Fund are having to make every effort to absorb pay award costs wherever possible. The Committee may also wish to consider that agreeing an increase in 2024-25 would mean a reduction in the funding available for other bodies funded by the Welsh Consolidated Fund, in particular the Senedd Commission and the Welsh Government.

The Committee may wish to seek assurances that robust consideration has been given to all possible efficiencies in order to mitigate budgetary cost pressures. In particular, of the four areas of additional need in 2024-25, the 'delivering electoral reform' heading refers to managing the impact of increasing divergence for Wales's devolved and reserved elections. The Committee may wish to explore whether that increase has solely fallen on the Senedd in respect of the Commission's devolved responsibilities, or the UK Parliament also in respect of the changes made for reserved elections.

Subject to the Committee's formal report following scrutiny and the Senedd's agreement of the inclusion of the 2023-24 in year supplementary request of £53,900 in a supplementary budget motion, my officials will work with the Electoral Commission to agree a payment plan for both the supplementary amount and in respect of the funding agreed by the Committee for 2024-25. If the Committee is unable to lay its report of scrutiny of this request prior to a supplementary budget motion it would be helpful if you could write again to myself and the Minister for Finance and Local Government giving an indication of whether the Committee is minded to agree the additional estimate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mick Antoniw". The signature is written in a cursive style. A short horizontal line is drawn underneath the name "Antoniw".

Mick Antoniw AS/MS

Gwnsler Cyffredinol a Gweinidog y Cyfansoddiad
Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution