

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i [ymgyngoriad y Pwyllgor Biliau Diwygio](#) ar [Fil Senedd Cymru \(Aelodau ac Etholiadau\)](#).

This response was submitted to the [Reform Bill Committee consultation](#) on the [Senedd Cymru \(Members and Elections\) Bill](#).

**SCME297 Ymateb gan: | Response from: Colin Thomas**

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30 October 2023

To whom it may concern,

In accordance with your instructions:

My name and address is above, I am writing as an individual and I am over the age of 18. I am happy for my name to appear with my submission.

The Wales Act 2017 devolved powers to the Senedd for elections, including powers to legislate to change its size, and without requirement for a referendum to take place prior to the use of such power. While the current Welsh Government feels that this gives them 'carte Blanche' to push through the bill to reform the Senedd, there is a very real danger that without public support it will add to the sense that it is failing to listen to the Welsh People. If the Welsh Government are so certain that enlargement it is good for Wales then they should present the case and let the public decide through a referendum. Trust in politicians and political parties is at an all time low, if this proposal for reform undertaken in the Senedd rather than through referendum it will be seen as politicians voting for more politicians which will be seen as unacceptable.

I understand that it is the norm for political parties to move forward on manifesto pledges believing they have the mandate from the electorate, this is not always the case as elections tend to focus on fewer issues that have a higher precedence with the electorate such as the health, education and the economy. I can vouch that not many people thoroughly read a party manifesto, people tend to vote for a party or individual on the larger issues and not pledges made on page 12 of a manifesto, the reform of the Senedd was not a priority at the last election. I feel it would be prudent for the Welsh Government to consider the reason why people vote and whether reform of the Senedd was a significant covered during the run up to the election in 2021.

One of the proposed changes would be to hold elections every four years, however, election turnouts since 1998 have been woefully low with turnout figures ranging from 38.2% to 47%. In light of this it would seem foolhardy to decrease the timescale



for elections when you have an electorate that appears to be apathetic. Holding more elections would increase costs which seems inappropriate when the public are not asking for them, especially at a time when budgets are under pressure and we have a cost of living crisis.

I am concerned that the additional financial costs of the reformed Senedd requires further scrutiny and investigation. It is reported that the addition of 36 members will cost an extra £18m per annum, but I don't think this is an accurate forecast as the cost of the Senedd in 2020-2021 was £62.5m, if you are increase the it by 60% it would be rational to expect costs to increase by a similar ratio. There are also set up costs of £8m to enlarge the chamber and to pay for other incidentals, so the real budget will be closer to £100m in the first year rising exponentially year by year all paid for from the Welsh Consolidated Fund. The Welsh government says the increased costs represents a tiny fraction (0.07%) of the £24bn overall Welsh budget, however when the cost of the enlargement is added to the existing costs this represents (0.4%) of the budget.

The public would be concerned with increased spending on the Senedd when there are funding gaps in essential services such as the NHS and Education,

The Senedd has 60 members for a country of 3.1 million, that is one for every 52,000 constituents, England has 533 MPs for 56 million people, one MP for every 105,000 people: London has 10 million people with an Assembly of just 25 members. Unlike my English friends I have 1 MP and 5 Senedd Members to represent me, they have one MP. One of the reasons cited for the reform of the Senedd is the ability to hold the welsh Government to account, but in nearly 25 years this has not been the case and recently the Welsh Government rejected a call to hold a COVID inquiry. If the Welsh Government refuse calls to hold a COVID Inquiry, how will enlargement make any difference in holding the government to account? In addition, the Welsh Government suggests greater scrutiny but we have a system in Wales where we can't recall or remove ineffectual Senedd Members, why should we have more politicians that we can't hold to account?

My understanding is that the bill proposes that elections to the Senedd after 2026 will be under a proportional representation system doing away with first past the post votes. We will no longer vote for individuals but vote for parties, the proportion of votes received will determine how many candidates from each party, every party will have a closed list and the candidates will be selected from these lists. This is a direct attack against democracy, people will not be able to vote for the person they may want to represent them, they will have to put up with a person that a political party has forced on to them. One of the elements of democracy is the ability to scrutinize party candidates prior to election, I have voted for the candidate I feel would be better for my local area rather than by party affiliation. This proposal would enable unelectable candidates to succeed without scrutiny, this could leave the Senedd open to infiltration by extreme and radical elements, creating a deeper chasm between politicians and the people of Wales.

I am greatly concerned that this public consultation has been badly managed, there have been no notices or announcements, I was only aware that there was a public consultation in response to a question I asked about this issue from the First

Minister. The minister in charge of the bill concedes this is a hard sell to voters and that is why I believe there is a reluctance to hold a referendum. If a referendum is not held it will result in public discord.

Yours Sincerely

C M Thomas