

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros
Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate
Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1490
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/10609/24

Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru

9th December 2024

Dear Carolyn,

I am writing in response to your letter of 12 November 2024 regarding Petition P-06-1490 'We feel there should be a Referendum before the Senedd has a further 36 Members'.

The compelling case for Senedd reform has been made in a succession of expert reports. It has been endorsed by three of the four political parties represented in the Senedd and has been voted for by a majority of Members of the Senedd.

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. 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 introduced in Westminster.

The role and responsibilities of the Senedd have changed considerably since it was first established in 1999, and its additional powers, including primary law-making powers and tax-varying powers, mean that there is a greater pressure on its existing capacity.

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 significant additional powers. The Scottish Parliament has 129 Members, and the Northern Ireland Assembly has 90, the latter for a population less than two-thirds that of Wales.

As a result, and following several independent reports recommending more Members, the Senedd in June 2022 voted by a two-thirds majority in favour of taking forward the recommendations of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform's report [Reforming our Senedd: A stronger voice for the people of Wales](#), published in May 2022. This report included a recommendation that the Senedd should have 96 Members to reflect the way its role and responsibilities have grown.

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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.

Investing in our democracy to better represent the people of Wales does have a cost attached to it. The Welsh Government has worked with partners, including the Senedd Commission, to develop detailed estimates for the cost implications of this legislation, which can be found, alongside information on engagement with the public, in the [Explanatory Memorandum](#) to the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act.

However, part of the rationale for the legislation is precisely that the current financial climate demands that we achieve best value for public money. The Welsh Government has an annual budget of over £24 billion. An improvement in value of less than 0.1% of this budget, as a result of Senedd committees being equipped with the capacity to deliver their scrutiny responsibilities more effectively, will offset the costs of this investment. Better scrutiny delivers better governance, and better governance pays for itself.

I understand the concern regarding funding for key areas of public services in Wales. Education and social care form the biggest areas of expenditure for local authorities. As a Cabinet, we recognise that demand for services, alongside cost pressures mean that authorities are continuing to make difficult decisions on services, efficiencies, and council tax in setting budgets. While the setting of these budgets is the responsibility of each local authority, taking account of the full range of sources of funding available as well as the pressures it faces, the Welsh Government will continue to prioritise frontline public services including local government as far as possible in our forthcoming budget decisions. The outlook is challenging, but I welcome the pragmatic way we are working together with local government to ensure we do all we can within the funding available.

Regarding the NHS in Wales, like the health service in other parts of the UK it faces enormous demand from the public. Every month it responds to 2m patient contacts in Wales from a population of just over 3m people. This is an incredible amount of activity – most people are seen and treated in their local communities by primary care services, like their local GP practice, their optician, dentist or pharmacy. About 500,000 people every month are seen in hospitals.

Delivering on the health priorities for the Welsh Population is a joint responsibility for Government and the NHS and Welsh Government has a long history of supporting our Welsh NHS. Examples include earlier financial support for pay awards, ensuring clinical leadership to support national programmes and service transformation. In addition, We have allocated £50 million to help health boards address long waiting times. This is on top of the £1 billion already allocated. This new money will be available for health boards to use immediately and will provide more treatments and operations; more tests and more outpatient appointments between now and the end of March 2025.

We have provided the NHS with additional funding this year and last year in the face of some of the toughest financial pressures we have experienced since the start of devolution. This financial year (2024-25), we have provided more than 4% extra to frontline NHS services in Wales, compared to less than 1% in England.

The **Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act**, which will deliver the majority of changes recommended by the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform, was passed by a supermajority of Members, and was given Royal Assent on 24 June 2024. The Welsh Government is now engaging with partners and stakeholders to implement the majority of the changes for the scheduled 2026 Senedd election.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the petition.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes that form a stylized representation of the name 'Huw Irranca-Davies'.

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