

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-06-1469
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/10411/24

Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair - Petitions committee

22 November 2024

Dear Carolyn,

Petition P-06-1469 Any Government policy or project that costs more than £10 Million must be voted in by the electorate

Thank you for your letter of 27 September regarding the above petition.

In a representative democracy such as ours, it is a well-established and accepted constitutional principle that political parties seek election and a mandate for their policies through the publication of election manifestos in advance of the election. A party winning a majority of the seats, or parties able to form a majority or command the confidence of the legislature, have the right to form a government and to seek the implementation of the policies for which they obtained a mandate at the election.

The government is accountable to the legislature for the implementation of their policies, and it is the responsibility of the Senedd to scrutinise their implementation, including their cost-effectiveness and value for money, as well as gathering evidence from experts, and recommending modifications. The legislature is, in turn, accountable to the electorate for their actions.

Whilst the petition is about the merits of holding referendums on government policies, rather than the specific examples it cites, it is worth considering the example of 20 mph speed limits.

It was clear there was a growing consensus on safe speeds in communities that we could build from. We still believe that 20mph is right, but we want to make sure we are getting the right speeds on the right roads.

Between April and August 2024, Ken Skates MS, Cabinet Secretary met and listened to citizens, bus drivers, emergency services, the police, young people, vulnerable people, businesses, county, town and community councillors, local authorities and many others – to understand their views on road safety in residential areas.

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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.

In July 2024, we gave highway authorities revised guidance to make it clearer where roads can be 30mph. In 2024, the public has had a chance to suggest where they feel changes should be made.

Highway authorities are now using our revised guidance to assess these suggestions.

Any change in speed limits will need to be made through a traffic regulation order. This process will take several months to complete.

Our response to feedback from members of the public and their elected representatives demonstrates how representative democracy should work and has worked.

Whilst referendums may enable public engagement and enhance the democratic process in certain circumstances, they also have significant drawbacks which necessitate caution with their use. We note the analysis and conclusions of the House of Lords Constitution Committee report, Referendums in the United Kingdom. We particularly note the arguments that referendums are not appropriate for settling complex issues and would be costly to administer. It is worth noting the costs of administering the last Senedd election came to £3,991,289.18 (this does not include the Covid related costs). The costs of holding multiple referendums during the course of a Senedd's term would incur significant expenditure. We also note the argument that referendums could undermine representative democracy.

For these reasons, whilst referendums can be used for consulting the public on issues of particular significance, we see no reason to depart from the well-established constitutional norms of our representative democracy.

There are, in our view, more appropriate ways we can improve our engagement with the public on the implementation of government policy. The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales report highlighted the growing challenges to Welsh democracy, including low levels of public knowledge of and engagement with Wales' democratic institutions. It proposed a set of reforms to strengthen democracy in Wales, including the establishment of an expert panel to help build capacity for democratic innovation and inclusive community engagement, and work is currently progressing on this agenda.

Yours sincerely,



Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

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