

# Statement by the Chair of the Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform

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**Title: Update on the work of the Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform**

**Date: 8 January 2020**

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Diolch, Llywydd. The Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform was established by this National Assembly in September 2019 to examine the recommendations of the expert panel on Assembly electoral reform. Members will recall that, in 2017, the expert panel reported on a wide range of issues, but at the core of its work was a recognition that the Assembly and its Members need to be able to carry out our responsibilities effectively if we are to properly serve the people that we represent. The expert panel concluded that, as devolution in Wales enters its next phase, the Assembly cannot continue as it is without risking its ability to deliver for the people and communities it serves.

The expert panel's recommendations on votes for 16 and 17-year-olds have been given effect by the Senedd and elections Bill. Our role as a committee is to examine the remaining recommendations, which embrace a range of significant issues. These include: the size of the Assembly; its diversity; how Members are elected; and, the areas that we represent. These can be seen as complicated and technical issues, but we must help to continue an informed public debate as they lie at the heart of our still-developing democracy in Wales. As a committee, we will look at each issue in turn.

We see no need to go over the previous ground, So, in carrying out our work, we will consolidate and add to the existing evidence, using the work of the expert panel as our starting point. I believe that the conversations that we hold and any recommendations that we make will be most effective if they underpin a long-term vision for the Senedd and are rooted in a broad base of political and public support. To achieve this, the committee will be outward looking and open minded. We will provide accurate and accessible information, seek evidence and gather opinions. We will use a broad range of methods to gather evidence and listen carefully to people's views.

Most of us in this Chamber have engaged with or have been part of this institution since its early days, but we must also remember that younger people—including the 16 and 17-year-olds who will have the right to vote for the first time in 2021—will never have known a Wales without devolution. To make sure that their voices are heard during our work, we

are exploring options for working with the Welsh Youth Parliament and for engaging with young people across Wales through the Assembly's education and outreach teams.

So, today marks a key moment in the committee's work. Since you voted to create this committee, we are aware that most of our deliberations have been in private, as we've received technical briefings and discussed the work programme that we're presenting today. This statement now provides the opportunity to share our plans with you. Today, we've published our strategic approach, setting out our aims and objectives for the coming months, as well as the terms of reference for each of our inquiries. I hope that this will provide clarity about how we will explore the three key issues within our remit.

We've also launched our first consultation today. We're seeking evidence from the electoral community, political parties and other stakeholders to inform our work on electoral systems, boundaries, and boundary-review mechanisms. In addition to gathering formal written evidence, we want everyone to be able to follow our work and tell us what they think. To facilitate this, we will be using the **'Your Wales' digital-engagement platform** to share information about our work and to provide opportunities for people to offer their thoughts and feedback on an ongoing basis. I hope that you, as Members, will encourage people in your constituencies and regions to engage with our work in this way.

I'm pleased today to have been able to outline our ambitious and comprehensive programme of work, which we intend to complete by autumn 2020. Indeed, our work has already begun, with an evidence session in December with the Llywydd, and discussions with stakeholders earlier this week. We're approaching our task with a sense of realism as we know that there is a range of different views amongst Members present here today. There will doubtless also be a range of views among those who will sit in these seats in the next Assembly, and amongst the constituents they will represent. We each approach these issues from our distinct perspectives, but we hope for meaningful discussion with, and hopefully between, political parties and the people who we all seek to represent.

We don't underestimate the task, but we will approach it with enthusiasm. As a minimum, we intend for our evidence-based conclusions to offer a roadmap for reform, which we hope will help political parties as they consider their manifestos for 2021 and maximise the chance of a consensus emerging on a way forward. As a committee, we have a challenging task ahead of us, but we also have a real and exciting opportunity to contribute to the continuing and flourishing democracy in Wales. Diolch yn fawr.