

Dawn Bowden AM  
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24 January 2020

Dear Dawn

### **Potential implications of any change in the size of the Assembly**

Thank you for your letter of 16 December 2019 seeking our views of the potential implications for Assembly Committees of any change in the size of the Assembly.

The Petitions Committee has discussed the specific issues raised and wishes to offer the following broad comments in response:

*Whether the current size of the Assembly has given rise to any implications or limitations for your Committee's work or the way in which you approach policy, legislative and financial scrutiny of the issues within your remit.*

We consider that the size of the Assembly has a bearing on the work that committees are able to undertake, primarily due to the level of demand currently placed on Assembly Members. The size of the current Assembly results in a number of Members sitting on multiple committees, which places restrictions on the size of their membership and the time available for them to meet. The current committee timetable is designed, in part, to limit the impact of timetable clashes for Members arising from committees meeting simultaneously.

Whilst these issues are common to all committees, the specific impact on the Petitions Committee relates to the fact that it is currently timetabled to meet for two hours each fortnight. This influences the design and structure of meetings, limiting the amount of time available for taking more detailed evidence on the issues raised through petitions. The Committee therefore has to apply a strong degree of prioritisation when scheduling such sessions in order to provide fair consideration to all petitions we receive, whilst also conducting detailed scrutiny where possible and beneficial.



Increasing the scope for the Committee to meet through, for example, longer or more frequent meetings could enable the Committee to take evidence in person from more petitioners and to hold greater numbers of detailed inquiries.

*How any recent or anticipated changes to the Assembly's powers or responsibilities, or the broader constitutional context, might affect your Committee's remit or how you undertake your role.*

Changes to the Assembly's powers and responsibilities have the potential to impact upon the Petitions Committee by widening the scope of the petitioning process. The rules governing the admissibility of petitions to the Assembly include a requirement that the action requested is within the powers of either the Assembly or Welsh Government. An increase in the scope of those powers or responsibilities could, therefore, lead to a corresponding increase in the number of admissible petitions received. However, the impact of any specific change would be difficult to forecast accurately.

*Any implications an increase in the size of the Assembly might have for the work of Assembly committees, including the support services they receive.*

We consider that both of the issues raised above have potential implications for the capacity of the current support services for the petitions process and the Petitions Committee, particularly in relation to the administrative support required to run the petitioning process and the Petitions Committee. Whilst some of the impact of these changes could potentially be mitigated by any future Petitions Committee making changes to its ways of working, an increase in the frequency of meetings and/or the number of detailed scrutiny sessions conducted by the Committee, would likely require an increase in the level of support required.

I hope that this information is helpful. We would be happy to provide more detail as required.

Yours sincerely



Janet Finch-Saunders AM  
Chair