

Huw Irranca-Davies MS
Former Chair
Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform

16 October 2023

Dear Huw

Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill

As you are aware, the Welsh Government formally introduced the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill ("the SC(ME) Bill") to the Senedd on 18 September 2023. The Reform Bill Committee's role is to undertake Stage 1 scrutiny of the general principles of the Bill. I am writing to invite you, as the former Chair of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform, to share your views on the Bill with us.

The remit given to the Special Purpose Committee by the Senedd was to consider the conclusions previously reached by the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform ("CSER") in its September 2020 report, and to make recommendations for policy instructions for a Welsh Government Bill on Senedd reform.

In 2017, the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform recommended that the Senedd should have at least 80, and preferably closer to 90, Members. In relation to the electoral system, the Expert Panel recommended that if its proposed interventions to support and encourage diversity of representation (including candidate-level legislative gender quotas and requiring the publication of candidate diversity information) were implemented, Members should be elected by single transferable vote ("STV"). It said that if such diversity interventions were not implemented, Members should be elected by flexible list proportional representation. In terms of electoral boundaries, it recommended that



either the current constituency boundaries or local authority boundaries should be used as a basis for creating new multimember constituencies.¹

In 2020, CSER concluded, based on the evidence it received and its consideration of the Expert Panel's recommendations, that the Senedd should have between 80-90 Members, elected by STV. Its report noted that it was unable to reach conclusions on electoral boundaries because the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed its ability to gather evidence.²

In 2022, the Special Purpose Committee recommended, among other matters, that the Senedd should have 96 Members, elected by closed list proportional representation to represent constituencies based upon the 32 new Westminster constituencies.³

It is clear from the Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill⁴, and from statements made by the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution⁵ and the First Minister⁶ that the Special Purpose Committee's report has played a substantial role in the Welsh Government's development of the policy proposals underpinning the SC(ME) Bill and the Bill itself.

Therefore, while responsibility for the SC(ME) Bill and the provisions it contains rests with the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution as Member in charge of the Bill, we would welcome your views as the former Chair of the Special Purpose Committee on a number of matters, including:

1. The Committee's interpretation of its remit (to consider the conclusions reached by the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform and to make recommendations for policy instructions for a Welsh Government Bill on Senedd reform), and how that remit shaped the Special Purpose Committee's recommendations.
2. The impact of the [joint position statement](#) issued by the First Minister and the then leader of Plaid Cymru on 10 May 2022, and the [letter](#) to the Special Purpose Committee of the same date, on the Committee's report, including any impact on the Committee's direction of travel, conclusions or recommendations.

¹ Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, [A parliament that works for Wales: the report of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform](#), November 2017, recommendations 1, 4 and 6

² Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform, [Senedd reform: the next steps](#), September 2020, recommendations 1 and 4 and para 16

³ Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform, [Reforming our Senedd: a stronger voice for the people of Wales](#), May 2022, recommendations 2, 7 and 18

⁴ For example, Welsh Government, [Senedd Cymru \(Members and Elections\) Bill: Explanatory Memorandum incorporating the Regulatory Impact Assessment and Explanatory Notes](#), September 2023, para 17

⁵ For example, [Plenary RoP \[para 206\], 19 September 2023](#), Reform Bill Committee RoP [paras 12, 25 and 27]

⁶ [Plenary RoP \[para 49\], 26 September 2023](#)

3. The evidence upon which the Special Purpose Committee based its recommendations, particularly recommendations in respect of: the specific number of Members (recommendation 2); the use of closed list proportional representation to elect Members of the Senedd (recommendation 7); the use of the D'Hondt electoral formula to allocate seats (recommendation 8); and the proposal that Senedd constituencies should initially be created by pairing the 32 Westminster constituencies established by the 2023 UK Parliamentary boundary review (recommendation 18).

4. The way in which the Special Purpose Committee's recommendations have been interpreted and reflected in the Welsh Government's Bill and accompanying Explanatory Memorandum.

We would welcome a written response on these matters by **Friday 3 November 2023**.

Yours sincerely



David Rees MS
Chair, Reform Bill Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.