



CPR_021

Elin Jones AC, Llywydd

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

Elin Jones AM, Presiding Officer

National Assembly for Wales

Commission on Parliamentary Reform
Written views from National Assembly for Wales

The Commission Secretariat
Room CG.07
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH99 1SP

2 February 2017

Dear Mr McCormick

Re: Submission to the Scottish Commission on Parliamentary Reform

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's important work and present a flavour of some the reforms initiated at the National Assembly for Wales.

My intention as Llywydd is to focus on three things in particular:

- Making government more accountable to the Assembly and the people of Wales;
- Making the work of the Assembly more relevant and topical; and
- Maximising capacity and strengthening the Assembly

In Annex 1, you will see a short article published 50 days after being elected as Llywydd which may be helpful to set the context. Annex 2, contains a series of electronic papers which refer to recent changes to procedures and I hope will assist in informing your deliberations. We will gladly respond to any additional queries you may have. We would also like to extend a welcome to Cardiff, should representatives from the Commission wish to visit and discuss matters of interest to them.

There are a number of ongoing pieces of work underway in which the Commission may be interested:

Name Change

The Assembly is currently consulting on changing the name of the Assembly. One of the drivers for change is how to better explain the role of the Assembly as distinct from the Welsh Government. The Assembly debated this issue in July and it was agreed that the name of the Assembly should reflect its constitutional status as a national parliament and that it needed to hear views from across Wales. The consultation document can be found here:

http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/Assembly%20Business%20section%20Documents/Name_Change_Consultation/NameChangeConsultation-PDF.PDF

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

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Assembly Commission ambitions for the future

The Assembly Commission agreed to support the establishment of a Youth Parliament for Wales, supported and funded by the Assembly Commission, and the development of a Digital Information and News Task Force. It also agreed to lead reform of the Assembly in relation to its size, electoral system and franchise:

<http://www.assembly.wales/en/newhome/pages/newsitem.aspx?itemid=1643&startDt=01/11/2016&endDt=30/11/2016>

I announced this week, the establishment of an expert panel to make recommendations on Assembly electoral reform:

<http://www.assembly.wales/en/newhome/pages/newsitem.aspx?itemid=1680>

I am aware that your Commission is also looking at communication and engagement as part of its work. Colleagues from the National Assembly for Wales Commission will be providing written and oral evidence separately in relation to this aspect. We have a positive story to share. Our outreach and youth engagement work is regarded as world class and we excel in innovative digital engagement.

I wish you well in your task. I look forward to receiving your final report. I am sure it will be of great interest and benefit to those of us wanting to strengthen Parliamentary engagement.

Yours sincerely

Elin Jones AM
Llywydd



Annex 1

It is little more than 50 days since I was elected Llywydd of the Fifth National Assembly. It is an understatement to say that a great deal has happened since then: the formation of a new Welsh Government; the introduction of the Wales Bill; the EU referendum result and the Prime Minister's announcement that he will step down within a few months, will affect the lives of everyone in Wales for years to come.

This has been the backdrop to my first few weeks in the role. Already it is clear to me that the position carries responsibilities that shape every aspect of the Assembly. As Llywydd, I am involved in much of the day-to-day operation behind the scenes and the routine management of business. Like the Speaker of any parliament, I chair its proceedings, maintaining order and ensuring that all points of view are heard. Already I have seen passions running high and, with turnout in the referendum so much higher than in last year's Assembly election, I could not be more conscious of the need for the Assembly to raise its standing in the eyes of the public and to demonstrate its value to the people of Wales.

To that end, I intend my time in office to be focused on three things in particular:

- Making government more accountable to the Assembly and the people of Wales;
- Making the work of the Assembly more relevant and topical; and
- Maximising capacity and strengthening the Assembly.

In my first 50 days, I feel that we have taken significant steps. The most important of these has been the establishment of a new system of committees. Committees are the engine room of our scrutiny of government and, with the business managers of each of the four largest parties, I have put in place reforms that will strengthen that work. We have created a new Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee to drive our work on important aspects of public policy that were perhaps underexposed in the previous Assembly. We have also established a committee to oversee the enormous implications for Wales flowing from the EU referendum result. The consequences of the vote will dominate the work of the Assembly for the next few years and the committee will provide a focus to ensure that Welsh interests are safeguarded during the withdrawal process, in any new relationship with the European Union and in future policy, finance and legislation.

If our committees are the engines of our scrutiny, then the Members who chair those committees are the pilots who guide, drive and communicate that work. I am delighted, therefore, that the Assembly agreed proposals to see, for the first time, committee chairs elected by secret ballot of the whole Assembly rather than rubber stamping appointments made by individual political groups or party leaders. I believe this single move could transform the work of committees,



sharpening their teeth as they hold the Welsh Government to account. Last week, the Assembly elected its chairs through this new procedure. For the first time, chairs are now genuinely mandated by the whole of the Assembly to undertake these vital roles. I have written to them all to set out the expectations I have for the way in which they will approach their task: to act strategically, impartially, and skilfully and to maximise the influence and relevance of their committee whilst maintaining its clear independence from the Welsh Government.

Looking forward, there is much more that I want to achieve during my time as Llywydd to maximise our capacity and increase our relevance. For example, I would like to see:

- an increase in the length of the formal Assembly business week, so that there is more time available for committee and plenary scrutiny;
- greater vibrancy in plenary proceedings by allocating time for new types of business such as statements from committee chairs at an early stage of committee inquiries to raise awareness and engagement; debates and legislation proposed by individual backbench Members; and direct public involvement in the setting of some plenary business;
- Ministers scrutinised more thoroughly and frequently on the issues that matter most to the public. I will do this either through the introduction of a new category of weekly topical questions or by taking a more liberal approach to accepting requests from Members for what are known as *urgent questions*;
- implementation of all of the recommendations to improve our legislative procedure made at the end of the last Assembly by the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee;
- new ways of drawing young people and other sections of the community directly into the work of the Assembly; and
- extensive, focused training and professional development for Members so that they are fully equipped to undertake their roles and to tackle the challenges posed by our new fiscal powers, legislative responsibilities and the impact of departure from the European Union.

Later this year, I hope that the Wales Bill will complete its passage through the UK Parliament. There is much in the Bill that will strengthen the Assembly but it could be better still. So I have published a set of amendments that I want to see made to the legislation, all of which focus on making the National Assembly a more effective parliament for the people of Wales. For that is what the National Assembly has become – a parliament. It makes the laws that govern our lives, sets the taxes that we pay, holds to account the government that spends money and takes decisions that affect us all, and it serves as the democratic focus for public debate on the most important issues of the day. I could not have said that of the Assembly to which I was first elected in 1999 but, today, I can. And so, for



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that reason, I would like to see the Assembly renamed, to reflect its standing today in the constitution of our country. Just a name, yes. But names matter because they define us and shape us in the minds of others. So later this year, I will publish a draft bill and invite public consultation on proposals to rename the Assembly a Parliament.

The challenges that our country face over the next few years are great. Wales needs its Parliament to rise to those challenges and I, as Llywydd, intend to do everything in my power to make that so.

END