

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Title: Assembly Reform Programme: publication of report of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform

Date: 12 December 2017

By: Elin Jones AM, Llywydd, as Chair of the Assembly Commission

The *Wales Act 2017* devolved important new responsibilities to the National Assembly, including legislative powers to determine how best to represent the people of Wales and hold the Welsh Government to account.

Among these responsibilities were powers over the Assembly's name and size, as well as its electoral and internal arrangements. As I announced in November 2016, the Assembly Commission is leading work to explore how these new powers may be exercised in order to make the institution a stronger, more accessible, inclusive and forward-looking parliament that delivers effectively for the people of Wales.

Following the unanimous agreement of the Assembly and a period of public consultation, in June 2017 I announced that the Assembly Commission had decided to introduce legislation to change the name of the institution to Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru.

In isolation, this change aims to achieve a better understanding among the public of the work of the Assembly, as well as encouraging greater engagement between the institution and the people and communities it serves. However, by encompassing wider reforms, any Assembly Reform legislation could also be an opportunity to:

- ensure that the institution truly has the capacity that it needs to serve the people and communities it represents;
- invigorate our democracy, and enthuse and engage young people;
- ensure that the Assembly's other electoral and internal arrangements, while robust, also provide the flexibility which is appropriate for a mature legislature.

It was on the basis of exploring these wider opportunities that I announced in June that the scope of the Assembly reform legislation would be considered once the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform had reported and the degree of political consensus was clearer.

I am pleased to inform Members that the Expert Panel has, today, published its report: **Parliament that Works for Wales**.



Under the strategic direction of its chair, Professor Laura McAllister, the Panel has reviewed and added to the existing evidence and research, and has made recommendations as to the number of Members the Assembly needs; how Members should be elected; and what the minimum voting age for Assembly elections should be.

I am grateful to Professor McAllister and the members of the Expert Panel for their detailed analysis of the evidence, informed by their wealth of expertise in the fields of electoral systems, parliamentary work and capacity, the constitutional position of the National Assembly, and wider issues of governance, including equalities, diversity and engagement.

The Panel's report makes a compelling case for reform of the size of the Assembly to be made in time for the 2021 election, if this institution is to fulfil its scrutiny and representative functions on behalf of the people of Wales in these challenging political, economic and constitutional times.

I am clear that fundamental constitutional issues of this nature cannot be separated from the political realities of representative democracy in Wales. To deliver change, we need to build wide political consensus within this institution and outside. To this end, I have been working closely with all political parties represented in the Assembly and am grateful to them all for having engaged so positively and constructively. The Political Reference Group, which I chair, has been acting as a sounding board for the Expert Panel. Its advisory role will continue but this next phase of reform must also include much wider engagement, with all Assembly Members, with civic and political society and, above all, with the people of Wales. To that end, the Commission and I have agreed that, in early 2018, we will consult widely on how the Panel's recommendations and the wider programme of reform should be taken forward.

