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Elin Jones MS
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Our reference: MC2021/14148

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5 July 2021

Dear Elin,

I am writing to inform you about the UK Government's legislative proposals to improve the accountability of the Electoral Commission as part of the Elections Bill which is being introduced in the UK Parliament today. The Llwydydd's Committee plays a central role in holding the Electoral Commission to account effectively in relation to its finances and its Five Year Plan Plan where it relates to devolved Welsh functions. For this reason, I am keen to seek your views about our proposals to ensure that they complement the work of your Committee.

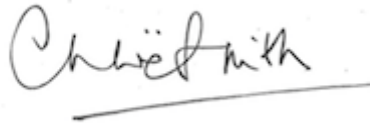
With the Elections Bill, the UK Government will deliver its manifesto commitments to strengthen the integrity of our elections and ensure that our democracy remains secure, fair, modern and transparent. The public rightly expects effective and independent regulation of the electoral system and the Electoral Commission has a vital role to play in upholding the integrity of free and fair elections and public confidence in that integrity. As the independent regulatory body charged with such pivotal responsibilities, the Commission should be fully accountable to the UK Parliament for the way it discharges its reserved functions. Consequently, as part of the Elections Bill, the UK Government will introduce a number of proposals relating to the parliamentary accountability of the Electoral Commission:

- To improve the Electoral Commission's accountability arrangements, we will make provision for the introduction of a Strategy and Policy Statement that will provide the Electoral Commission guidance on the exercise of its functions.
- To ensure that the UK Parliament is able to hold the Electoral Commission to account more effectively, we will amend the role and powers of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission to give it the power to examine the Electoral Commission's compliance with its duty to give regard to the Strategy and Policy Statement. We will also maintain the status quo by providing clarity in law that the Electoral Commission should not bring criminal prosecutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

These proposals were also outlined in a written ministerial statement that was laid before the House of Commons and the House of Lords on 17 June on 'Increasing parliamentary accountability in electoral policy' and are further detailed in the information pack attached to this letter. In this pack, you will find a summary of the Government's policy, the clauses for the measures (with a note providing explanations on the clauses) and an illustrative example of a Strategy and Policy Statement.

It is my hope that these measures will help to renew confidence in the performance of the Electoral Commission across the political spectrum. I look forward to hearing your views about our proposals. My officials and I remain at your disposal to provide you with any further information you may require.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chloe Smith', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Chloe Smith MP
Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution