

Business Committee Senedd Reform Consultation: Plaid Cymru Senedd Group Response

October 2022

1. The Plaid Cymru Senedd Group (the Group) welcomes the opportunity to feed into the Business Committee's consultation on specific aspects of Senedd Reform, specifically in relation to the 4 recommendations relating to their work made by the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform.
2. This paper reflects the direction of travel the Group believes discussions regarding specific aspects of Senedd Reform proposals should be heading in. The Group are nevertheless mindful that the eventual agreed outcome in relation to all 4 matters will need to be capable of commanding the support of the two thirds of the Senedd's Members voting for the legislation.

The size of the Welsh Government in a larger Senedd

3. The Group understands that given the basis for Senedd Reform in part is due to the unrecognisable change in the nature and extent of the Senedd's powers compared to the institution created in 1999 and the necessity for the Senedd to take on further powers in the future. This in turn means the size of Government may need to also increase to reflect increased executive and portfolio responsibilities required of Government.
4. This should not, however, override the other important driver behind reform, scrutiny, and ensuring there are more backbench Members available to scrutinise Government work in Plenary and in Committee meetings.
5. Therefore, the number of Government Ministers should not increase by a greater rate than the increase of Senedd Members. This would mean the

threshold for the number of Government Ministers – in addition to the First Minister and Counsel General – would be 19.

6. The legislation could also provide, as an additional safeguard, for Standing Orders to contain provision that a move to depart from the current number of 12 Government Ministers towards the higher threshold of 19, should be approved by a vote in the Senedd, subject to a simple majority.

The number of Deputy Presiding Officers in a larger Senedd

7. The Group believes that one Deputy Presiding Officer, alongside the Llywydd would be sufficient.
8. Should it become clearer that additional capacity is needed, an additional Deputy Presiding Officer, or an Acting Chair for Plenary Meetings could be elected through procedures laid out within the Standing Orders provided that this would not effect the political balance of the Senedd in a situation whereby the political balance of power in the institution is split equally between the government and opposition as is currently the case.
9. Having additional Deputy Presiding Officers may help ensure that the expectations on them won't be too strenuous and impactful on family and care responsibilities, should Senedd Plenary meetings be conducted on additional days to Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
10. This matter does not necessarily have to be determined at this point on the face of the forthcoming Bill, and could instead be decided through changes to Standing Orders, at a later date.

The number of Senedd Commissioners in a larger Senedd

11. The number of Commissioners does not need to be increased, as the volume of work should remain manageable. However, in line with the point above in regard to political balance in relation to Deputy Presiding Officers, there should be at least one Commissioner from each party Group represented in the Senedd following the next election.

12. This matter could also be decided through changes to Standing Orders, at a later date.

The consequences of a Member changing their political party if elected through a closed proportional list system

13. The Group understands the importance of striking a balance between ensuring the public get the Senedd and Parties they voted for, as well as ensuring those parties are not too powerful and restrictive on individuals Members to be independently minded in a reformed Senedd.

14. If a Member ceases to be a member of the party they were originally elected to, they should continue as an independent Member without joining another Group, but they should not cease to be a Member of the Senedd. This would ensure that parties do not have complete control over Members, and would also allow Members to continue to fulfil their duties if, for example, a Member was suspended from their group on a temporary basis as a result of any disciplinary process.

15. Therefore, should there be change affecting a Member's party group affiliation, this would not impact on matters such as the allocation of resources, Senedd opposition time, and committee proportionality and chairing arrangements

provided to Senedd Groups on the basis of the election result at the start of the Senedd term.

16. Mechanisms and provisions should be in place to ensure that if a Member ceases to be a Member of the Senedd, through the creation of a casual vacancy, they should be replaced by the next candidate on the party list, unless that individual may have ceased to be a member of said party for any reason. This could have implications for gender balance of the Senedd, and consideration should be given to maintaining at least 50/50 representation.