

SCECLB40 -P Llywydd

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Biliau Diwygio | Reform Bill Committee

Bil Senedd Cymru (Rhestrau Ymgeiswyr Etholiadol) | Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill

Ymateb gan Y Llywydd | Evidence from Llywydd



Y Gwir Anrhydeddus Elin Jones AS

Llywydd, Senedd Cymru

Right Honourable Elin Jones MS

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David Rees MS

Chair of the Reform Bill Committee

15 April 2024

Dear David,

Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidates Lists) Bill

Thank you for your letter of 22 March 2024, and for the opportunity to assist the Committee in its scrutiny of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill ("SC(ECL) Bill"). Please find enclosed my response to the questions raised in your letter.

As you will know, as Llywydd, I laid my statement on legislative competence in relation to the SC(ECL) Bill (as required under Standing Order 26.4) on 11 March 2024. As requested, I write to you now in my capacity as both Chair of the Senedd Commission, and Chair of the Senedd's Business Committee. The information enclosed is, therefore, provided independently of my statement on legislative competence. Equally, my enclosed response should bear no influence on the interpretation of my statement on legislative competence.

If I can be of any further assistance to the Committee in its deliberations please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt. Hon. Elin Jones MS/AS

Llywydd and Chair of the Senedd Commission

Response to questions contained within the letter from the Chair of the Reform Bill Committee: 22 March 2024

Question 1: We note that the Welsh Government's Regulatory Impact Assessment for the SC(ECL) Bill identifies no costs or savings to the Senedd Commission. What involvement has the Senedd Commission had in the development of the Regulatory Impact Assessment? Can you confirm that there are no anticipated quantifiable or unquantifiable costs or savings to the Senedd Commission associated with the SC(ECL) Bill?

Response: I can confirm that the Senedd Commission has had no involvement in the development of the SC(ECL) Bill's Regulatory Impact Assessment. The Commission provided costings for the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill. I understand that, given the scope of the SC(ME) Bill and information provided, the Welsh Government did not require the Senedd Commission to provide any additional information to inform the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the SC(ECL) Bill.

Question 2: What preparations is the Senedd Commission making to raise public awareness of the SC(ECL) Bill? What is the estimated cost of this activity?

Response: A high-level communications plan has been developed in anticipation of the passing of the reform legislation.

The Senedd Commission's communications campaign for Senedd Reform will set out to:

- Raise awareness of the changes to the Senedd;
- Increase understanding of the role of the Senedd and its Members; and
- Encourage participation in the Senedd election.

This will largely complement the objectives of the Senedd Commission's Communications and Engagement Strategy for the Sixth Senedd, which is in its third year and aims to reach audiences who have not previously engaged with the Senedd. This will remain the Senedd Commission's priority audience, but due to the scale of the changes, the Communications and Engagement Strategy will also incorporate techniques to reach those who are more likely to have engaged with the Senedd and establish itself as a trusted source of information.

Considering the scale of the changes and their importance, work has already begun to explore opportunities to work with partners, such as Welsh Government and Electoral Commission, to align the Senedd Commission's communications plans and ensure each institution is working together wherever possible and to avoid the duplication of efforts, confusing messaging and to provide best use of public money.

The Senedd Commission's Senedd Reform Campaign Plan is split into phases that extend from the passing of the Bill to the introduction of a new, reformed Senedd in 2026.

Phase One – Information Sharing (Summer 2024 – Spring 2025)

This phase of the campaign will concentrate efforts on ensuring people engaging with the Senedd are able to easily access clear and understandable information on the changes and how it will affect them.

This includes updates to the Senedd's website, updated information on site for visitors to the Senedd, updated education sessions and information at the Senedd Commission's summer shows.

This phase of the campaign will also be used to mark the 25th anniversary of the Senedd to highlight what is next in its journey, including exploring media opportunities and events at the Senedd hosted by the Llywydd.

Phase Two – Inspiring Participation (Spring 2025 – May 2026)

During this phase efforts will be stepped up to reach audiences who do not typically engage with the Senedd, as well as maintaining connections with those who have done so before.

This includes focusing most of the Senedd Commission's face-to-face engagement activities on Senedd Reform – including summer shows, community outreach, events and education sessions, using audience insight to align the activities with the needs of those target audiences.

The peak of this phase will come towards its end, when the Senedd Commission launches its election information campaign, early ideas for which include working with social media content creators, a digital advertising campaign, community outreach – with a focus on communities that have been less likely to engage with the Senedd previously, and a step-up of education sessions with a focus on those over 16.

The Senedd Commission will further explore partnership working with key organisations – such as the Electoral Commission - during this phase to ensure efforts are not duplicated and to maximise reach. This could include collaborating on education resources and events, and sharing information on marketing campaigns.

Phase Three – Introduction of a Reformed Senedd (May 2026 – Autumn 2026)

This phase will focus on raising awareness of the Senedd and what it can do to support people and their communities.

With the biggest change likely to be around Members and their constituencies, a key focus of this phase will be on supporting people to find their Members and what their Members can do to support them. This will be a focused effort across all channels, including digital advertising, local media, community engagement, and visits and tours.

Costings

The Regulatory Impact Assessment for the SC(ME) Bill includes the costs of raising public awareness in relation to Senedd reform legislation. No further costings have been identified for the SC(ECL) Bill.

Question 3: In light of the likely increase in the number of Members of the Senedd with caring responsibilities for children and infants, has any consideration been given to making adaptations to the Senedd estate, such as the provision of an on-site crèche facility, or increasing the provision of accessible parking, family rooms, and facilities for breastfeeding and expressing milk?

Response: In response to Senedd Reform proposals, the Ty Hywel 26 Project has been established within the Senedd Commission's Ways of Working programme. The scope of this project, noting the challenging timescales involved for delivery by early 2026, is to provide additional office space for the potential increase in Members and their support staff, whilst also accommodating Senedd Commission staff and providing sufficient space for an increased number of Welsh Government Ministers and officials. Consultation with Members on their needs are being sought through a number of ways including Cwrt drop ins, Members reference groups and workshops for both the Ty Hywel and Siambwr projects. The Tŷ Hywel project will consider necessary adaptations should Members make representations to that end.

Within the Ways of Working programme, the Senedd Commission has also established the Cardiff Bay 2032 project. This work will identify and deliver the Senedd's long-term estate and accommodation needs, including consideration of a wide range of facilities needed to support the Senedd and its Members, within the funding parameters that are agreed by the Senedd. At the appropriate point in the development of the project, the Senedd Commission will undertake detailed engagement with party groups to ensure that Members' needs are fully reflected within the designs for any proposed future accommodation option.

Question 4: Has any consideration been given to the Senedd's future ways of working to address barriers that might otherwise inhibit women and under-represented groups from standing for election, such as the timetabling of Senedd business, flexible working practices and technological innovations?

Response: In relation to any barriers which may be presented by the Senedd's procedures, the Business Committee considered a paper on procedural preparedness for Senedd reform in November 2023 and agreed in principle to commence consideration of areas of procedural reform in autumn 2024.

In its current form, the reform legislation contains a number of provisions which, if passed, will necessitate changes to Senedd procedures, including amendments to Standing Orders and associated guidance.

Although the parameters of this review are currently being developed, Business Committee will need to, as a minimum:

- review Standing Orders and associated guidance in light of the Senedd Reform legislation, once passed, and
- propose changes to Standing Orders to the Senedd to ensure that there are no procedural impediments to the operation of the Seventh Senedd.

As part of the work it undertakes to scope this review, the Business Committee will consider, among other things, whether to include matters such as organising business differently and/or considering the effect of any existing or potential procedural changes on the ability of the Senedd to attract as wide and diverse a range of Members as possible.

Additionally, in May 2022 the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform made a recommendation to the Business Committee that it should consider “the practical and procedural issues associated with...two Members job sharing a particular role (such as that of a Committee Chair)”, citing its potentially positive impact on the diversity of candidates standing for election as a reason to explore this area further. The matter has been added to the Business Committee’s procedural forward work programme and is scheduled for consideration in 2024.

Since then, provision relating to a review of possible job sharing (and temporary holding) of offices relating to the Senedd has been proposed in the SC(ME) Bill. In January 2024, the Reform Bill Committee recommended that the SC(ME) Bill be amended to remove the mechanism for reviewing possible job-sharing of offices relating to the Senedd, and that the Business Committee should consider proposing the establishment of a new committee in this Senedd to explore issues relating to job sharing and temporary holding of an office, or asking an existing Senedd Committee with a relevant remit to undertake the work. The Business Committee accepted this recommendation noting that it would consider the request made once there was certainty around the legislative changes (anticipated to be summer term 2024).

In the meantime, as committee chairs are non-statutory roles and therefore do not require legislative changes to enable job sharing, the Business Committee has undertaken initial consideration of proposals for committee chairs job sharing. This early work included consideration of information presented to Senedd committees and elsewhere relating to the impact of job-sharing on the accessibility and flexibility of roles, and the diversity of those who take them on. The Business Committee will return to this work in more detail during the summer term 2024.

It should be noted that the organisation of Senedd business and the timetable are normally matters for the Business Committee and Senedd to decide at the start of its term. In July 2022 the Senedd agreed a number of changes to Standing Orders that had been proposed by the Business Committee following a review of temporary Standing Order 34 and remote participation of Members in Senedd proceedings, both of which had been introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Having consulted with Members, party groups and others, the Business Committee proposed that the ability for Members to participate remotely in Plenary and committee meetings should be maintained. Following the Senedd’s agreement of changes to Standing Orders, guidance covering virtual and hybrid proceedings was

issued under Standing Order 6.17. The Business Committee has noted that this will be kept under review in light of experience during the Sixth Senedd.

In terms of technological innovations, the Senedd Commission employs a range of technologies that help to remove the barriers to participation in Senedd business, that otherwise might inhibit individuals or groups from standing for election.

Robust cybersecurity measures have allowed the Senedd Commission to deliver ICT tools that enable safe, seamless communication and collaboration from any Internet connected location. Video conferencing, instant messaging, and virtual collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom facilitate real-time interactions, allowing Members to work from different locations. This extends to formal parliamentary proceedings such as Plenary and committee meetings, allowing Members to fully participate remotely, including voting.

In response to the Senedd Reform proposals, the Siambwr 2026 Project has been established within the Ways of Working Programme. This project will deliver an expanded chamber capable of accommodating 96 Members. Central to this project are improvements to the technologies that underpin Plenary meetings, and the need to ensure that any change takes account of the needs of all those who may wish to stand for election to the Senedd. Full equality impact assessments will be completed for both projects as they progress.

Like many organisations, the Senedd Commission is seeking to harness the benefits of generative AI. It is anticipated that Senedd Members will be able to harness the automation and efficiency improvements these technologies can deliver, eliminating many routine tasks and freeing up Members' time.

All of these technologies will benefit from future improvements and will continue to adapt to allow Members to undertake their role in a way that suits their specific needs and the needs of their constituents.