



## Dawn Bowden MS | AS

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David Rees MS  
Chair of the Reform Bill Committee  
SeneddReform@Senedd.Wales

19 December 2023

Dear David,

Thank you for your invitation to respond to the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill ("the SCME Bill"), as the former Chair of the Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform ("the CSER").

Whilst I am sure you will be familiar with the CSER's report, I have enclosed a summary of its recommendations with this letter.

In terms of the SCME Bill, I am pleased to observe that it provides for much of what the CSER Committee recommended, albeit with some differences following the further work of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform ("the Special Purpose Committee").

In broad terms, the CSER made recommendations in relation to the size of a future Senedd and the means of electing its members, and in relation to electing a more diverse Senedd.

I seek to address how these recommendations have been addressed below.

### Size of the Senedd and electoral arrangements

CSER recommended an increase in size of between 80 and 90 members. The SCME Bill provides for an increase to 96 members. Whilst this is a marginally greater increase in size than recommended by CSER, it is an arithmetically logical number to arrive at in light of the change in the number of Welsh Westminster constituencies to 32, a number that had not been agreed when the CSER arrived at its conclusions.

The SCME Bill addresses the CSER's recommendation that ongoing boundary review arrangements be established for Senedd constituencies.

CSER recommended the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system. This is, of course, different to the closed list system recommended by the Special Purpose Committee and that has been provided for in the SCME Bill. However, the SCME Bill still provides for an electoral system that is not less proportional than the current system for Senedd elections. The SCME Bill goes some way towards meeting the principle of the CSER's recommendation, even if it does not deliver the system that was preferred by the CSER at the time of its work.

### **Election of a more diverse Senedd**


Recommendations were made by the CSER with a view to progressing towards the election of a more diverse Senedd. In making these recommendations, the CSER was aware that legislative change in this area could be challenging, due to possible constraints on the Senedd's legislative competence.

The Welsh Government's intention to introduce a second Bill to legislate for a more diverse Senedd is welcome, and would meet the CSER's desire to see steps taken towards enabling the election of a more diverse Senedd.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to the SCME Bill, as the former Chair of the CSER Committee. The work of the CSER showed that there was clear and compelling evidence for electoral reform. The introduction of legislation to deliver electoral reform represents a significant step toward delivering the reforms recommended by the CSER.

I wish you and the Reform Bill Committee well in your scrutiny of the SCME Bill.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

**Dawn Bowden MS**  
**Member of the Senedd for Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney**

Enclosed: PDF Summary of the CSER recommendations

# **Senedd reform: the next steps**

## Summary of recommendations

September 2020

The Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform was established to examine the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform in respect of the size of the Senedd and how Members are elected.

These issues are central to representative democracy in Wales. We know that more still needs to be done to build political consensus around specific reform proposals, but we believe that there is clear and compelling evidence that electoral reform is required. This note summarises our recommendations. Full details may be found in our report: *Senedd reform: the next steps*.

It is matter of deep regret that the Welsh Conservative group in the Senedd decided not to participate, and that the Brexit Party group withdrew at a late stage after we had already reached initial conclusions on many of the issues.

Legislation to reform the Senedd will require broad political consensus, including a 40 Member supermajority. We hope, therefore, that all political parties who contest the 2021 Senedd election will reflect carefully on our conclusions and recommendations; that they will work together to reach consensus on reform proposals; and that they will commit to taking legislative action early in the Sixth Senedd to reform our legislature and strengthen our democracy in Wales.



**Dawn Bowden MS**  
**Chair, Committee on Senedd Electoral Reform**



## How many Members and how they should be elected

1. We agree with the Expert Panel that the Senedd is currently too small, and recommend that a Bill should be introduced early in the Sixth Senedd to:
  - **Increase the size of the Senedd to between 80 and 90 Members.**  
We believe that investing in our democracy will be cost effective by improving governance and representation, enhancing scrutiny and oversight of the Welsh Government, and leading to more effective policy, more efficient spending and better legislation.
  - **Introduce the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system.**  
This will give voters more choice, maintain clear links between Members and constituencies, and produce more proportional electoral outcomes.
  - **Establish boundary review arrangements.**  
As well as establishing multimember STV constituencies, ongoing boundary review arrangements will help to maintain equal representation and voting power for people across Wales.
2. If reforms are to take effect at the 2026 election, **political consensus needs to be reached very early in the Sixth Senedd** on the proposed reforms and who will develop and lead the legislation.

## Electing a more diverse Senedd

3. We strongly believe that there should be **broadly equal numbers of women and men in the Senedd**, and that there should be **Members of the Senedd from a range of diverse communities and backgrounds**.
4. We would like to see **positive action to help overcome the structural inequalities and barriers in society** which make this difficult. Some of the actions we have recommended include:
  - Political parties **publishing information about how diverse their electoral candidates are** and **plans setting out how they will increase diversity and inclusion** in the way they work.
  - More cross-party work on how **job sharing for Members of the Senedd** and **diversity quotas for protected characteristics other than gender** could work in practice.
  - Providing **financial support to people with disabilities who want to stand for election**, and changing the rules so that **spending as a result**

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## **of disability, childcare or other caring responsibilities does not count towards election campaign spending limits.**

5. Political parties could already do some of these things voluntarily, and we think they should. Other actions would need legislation. The Senedd's powers to make laws about equality and diversity are limited. Before including gender or diversity quotas in a Senedd reform Bill, Members would have to consider these limits and the impact on the overall timescales if the Senedd did not have the necessary powers to legislate. We have recommended that the **UK Government should be asked to make sure measures to increase the diversity of the Senedd's membership would be within the Senedd's powers.**

## Public awareness, understanding and engagement

6. People in Wales have different levels of understanding about what the Senedd and its Members do and how Members are elected. This makes it harder to encourage people from different communities or backgrounds to take part in the Senedd's work or to think about standing for election. It also makes it more difficult to explain why we believe the number of Members should be increased.

7. The work already happening to tell people about the changes to who can vote in Senedd elections and the Senedd's new name may help, but we need to **make sure that communication reaches everyone in Wales**, and encourages them to vote and to take part in the Senedd's work. We believe it would also be helpful for the Senedd to provide **more information about what Members do and how the Senedd's work makes a difference** to the issues people care about.

8. We had planned to hold a citizens' assembly to bring together people from across Wales to learn about the Senedd's role and discuss how many Members the Senedd should have. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we could not do this safely. We recommend that a **citizens' assembly should be held as part of developing a Senedd reform Bill.**

## A 60 Member Sixth Senedd

9. The number of Members cannot be increased until 2026. This means that **interim measures** will be needed to help the 60 Members of the Sixth Senedd fulfil their representative, scrutiny and legislative roles effectively.

10. The Senedd will need to consider how well different options might work and whether there could be any unintended consequences. It may be possible to learn lessons from new ways of working used during the COVID-19 pandemic, or to try out other options between now and the end of the Fifth Senedd.

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