

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru Y Pwyllgor Deisebau	National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee
Adolygiad o'r System ddeisebau Cymru y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol	Review of the National Assembly for Wales Petitions System
Ymateb gan: CLILC	Response from: WLGA



Date/Dyddiad: 17 July 2015
Please ask for/Gofynnwch am: Steve Thomas
Direct line/Llinell uniongyrchol:
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William Powell AM
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Steve Thomas CBE
Chief Executive
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Dear William,

Review of the National Assembly for Wales' Petitions System

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Thank you for your letter regarding the above matter.

The Welsh local Government Association welcomes the review of the Assembly's Petitions System. The WLGA supports the work of the Petitions Committee, both in principle and in practice. An effective public petitions system helps encourage and facilitates public access to and engagement with the National Assembly and Welsh Government. Given many petitions relate to public services, the

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Petitions Committee regularly seeks the views of the Welsh Local Government Association and other partners in considering petitions.

Although the WLGA has not undertaken a comparison of Petitions Systems in other legislatures, generally the Assembly's current petitions system appears to be broadly effective and the process and standing orders appear appropriate. We have however previously written to the committee on the issue of signature thresholds.

As the consultation document notes, the Committee receives a significant number and varied petitions and it is not always possible for the Committee, or partners, to 'give equal or urgent consideration to all petitions'. There is merit therefore in reviewing the number of signatures required and scope of admissible petitions, whilst seeking to maintain a flexible and responsive system allowing the public to raise matters of concern as easily as possible.

The current threshold of 10 signatures to trigger a petition can lead to petitions which do not express wider community support or can unfortunately be frivolous in nature. As a comparison, the City of Cardiff Council requires 50 signatures and the City and County of Swansea requires 30 signatures for petitions. Councils in England operate similar thresholds, for example Manchester City Council, one of the largest local authorities in England with over 500,000 residents, requires 100 signatures for a petition and for a petition to be debated at full council requires 4,000 signatures. Similarly, in a large County Council like Norfolk, with a population in excess of 850,000, the petition must attract a minimum of 5,000 signatures for a full Council debate or 2,500 signatures to trigger an officer's attendance at a Panel meeting. Wales has a population in excess of 3 million people but the National Assembly's petitions thresholds are much less precise. Whilst it could be argued that this increases accessibility, many of the petitions we are requested to comment on appear to lack public support and are not always grounded in financial reality.

Given the number and range of petitions received, on occasions, the petitions process can present a capacity challenge for public service partners, such as the WLGA, to provide proportionate responses to all petition referrals received. The WLGA therefore supports the continuation of the approach whereby matters which are the responsibility of local authorities should not be considered; this is a key point of principle given authorities are democratically accountable to their communities but also in terms of practice, as it avoids duplication of resources in considering the same matter a number of times by different bodies.

Given the collective capacity and resources committed by the Committee and its secretariat, the Welsh Government and partners in responding to public petitions, it would be worthwhile undertaking a review of the impact and outcomes of petitions received. The WLGA notes that the Scottish Parliament publishes 'Petition Outcomes' on its website. The WLGA recognises that not all petitions lead to tangible outcomes in terms of policy or legislative change, and the petition process is often successfully used to raise the public profile of a particular matter or focus and mobilise community efforts around a particular issue or cause. However, given the public efforts and expectations around petitioning and the consequent public service resources invested in response, it would be valuable to assess the impact and outcomes of particularly significant petitions. Similarly, case studies of influential and successful petitions could be used to share learning and promote the Assembly's petitions process more widely.

Yours sincerely



Steve Thomas CBE
Chief Executive / Prif Weithredwr