

I have just had sight of the written communication to Assembly Members headed “Remuneration Board of the National Assembly for Wales” dated 13 July 2016, signed by yourself as Chair of the Board.

I am writing to register my opposition to the proposed amendment and to outline the reasons for my opposition. Firstly, I know of no National Parliament (or Assembly) of any country in the world in which its Members are permitted to live outside that country. Wales must be unique in this respect. Enabling AMs to live anywhere in the UK – Dover, Carlisle or even Shetland or Derry in Northern Ireland is absolutely preposterous. How can members hope to effectively and sympathetically represent their constituents if they do not, to any degree, share their experiences of living in the constituency or even the country? I ask rhetorically: Are Stormont Members allowed to live in Ipswich or Stornoway? Are members of Jersey’s parliament permitted to live in Orkney? Are MPs allowed to live in France or Russia? Most importantly, are AMs to be allowed to influence and pass laws which they themselves will not be subject to?

In Wales, even County Councillors have to live/work in the county in which their constituency lies. As this is a perfectly reasonable expectation for County Councillors, the expectation that AMs live in Wales is surely a great deal more reasonable. What is desperately needed is not an amendment to the Determination to reward Members whose main home is outside Wales by making them eligible for residential accommodation expenditure but an amendment to the Government of Wales Act 2006 to preclude people living outside Wales from being AMs (whatever their political affiliations).

Extending the “Outer Area” to include the whole of the UK introduces a ludicrous anomaly. It means that an AM living in England say 2 or 5 miles across the border could claim the maximum allowance permissible for accommodation in Cardiff – the same as an AM living in Anglesey with a 5 hour journey to the capital! Indeed, it is difficult not to view this as an incentive for individuals (especially failed politicians) living nearby in England to put themselves forward as National Assembly candidates. It could, theoretically, lead to many – or even all – of Wales’ AMs living in England!

For these reasons the proposal is – without doubt – ridiculous and at least in part undemocratic. The sooner it is changed so that Wales has the same arrangements in this respect as all other countries – and even with its own County Councils – the better. This proposal as it stands will serve to make Wales the contempt of the democratic world.