WRITTEN STATEMENT

Title: Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill

Date: 12 February 2019

By: Elin Jones AM, Llywydd, as Chair of the Assembly Commission

I am pleased to inform Assembly Members that I have today introduced the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill to the National Assembly, together with its Explanatory Memorandum and regulatory impact assessment.

The introduction of the Bill follows a period of public consultation by the Assembly Commission on proposals to change the name of the National Assembly, on the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform and on other proposed changes to the Assembly’s electoral and internal arrangements.

The Bill proposes to use powers in the Wales Act 2017 to:

* change the name of the institution from the National Assembly for Wales (Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru) to the “Senedd”, and make consequential changes to relevant names, titles and descriptors; the “Senedd” may also be known as “Welsh Parliament”;
* lower the minimum voting age in Assembly elections to 16, and implement reform of associated electoral registration arrangements;
* make changes to the law on disqualification from being an Assembly Member;
* place a duty on the Senedd to consider the financial and oversight arrangements for the work of the Electoral Commission in relation to devolved Welsh elections and devolved referendums;
* introduce a regulation-making power to implement Law Commission recommendations;
* extend the deadline for the first meeting of the Assembly after an election; and
* clarify Assembly Commission powers to charge for goods and services.

Members agreed unanimously in July 2016 that the Assembly should change its name to reflect better its constitutional status as the national parliament that it is today. The Bill seeks to give effect to this resolution and improve understanding of the role of the National Assembly by renaming it the “Senedd”. My engagement with Members and party groups suggests this is the name that carries most support in the Assembly. The Bill provides that the Senedd may also be known as the “Welsh Parliament”, to reflect its constitutional status and aid understanding of the name Senedd.

I propose that the change of name will come into force in May 2020 to ensure that the public are familiar with it ahead of the Assembly elections in 2021.

Lowering the minimum voting age in Assembly elections to 16 will reflect the majority view of those consulted on the recommendations of the Expert Panel, which recommended that doing so would be a powerful way to raise political awareness and participation among young people. This will provide consistency with the intended lowering of the voting age to 16 for local government elections and I have worked closely with the Welsh Government to develop this aspect of the Bill.

Provisions in the Bill will seek to clarify the law on disqualification from membership of the Assembly, in order to make it clearer who can stand for election and serve in the Assembly. Such provisions will also enable and encourage more people to stand for election to the National Assembly by removing some of the current barriers to standing for election while holding other roles.

I intend that the lowering of the minimum voting age, and changes to the law on disqualification, will have effect for the purposes of the Assembly elections in 2021.

The Wales Act 2017 provided the Assembly with responsibility for devolved Welsh elections and referendums. The Assembly Commission considers that as the Assembly takes responsibility for devolved elections, the Assembly should also consider changing the financial and oversight arrangements for devolved elections. The Bill therefore places a duty on the Assembly to consider the Electoral Commission’s arrangements, for example whether it should be funded by the Assembly for its work on devolved Welsh elections and whether it should become accountable to the Assembly for such work.

In 2016, following a period of consultation, the Law Commission proposed that the law on elections should be reformed. Interim recommendations made by the Law Commission were aimed at simplifying the administrative arrangements for elections and, where appropriate, standardising those arrangements across the four parts of the UK. The Bill provides the Welsh Government with power to make such subordinate legislation as is required to implement Law Commission recommendations.

The Bill also makes changes to the Assembly’s internal arrangements, by extending the deadline for the first meeting of the Assembly following an election and clarifying the Assembly Commission’s powers to charge for goods and services. These changes are aimed at ensuring the Assembly is able to operate as effectively as possible.

The Assembly Commission has been involved in discussions with key stakeholders throughout the development of this Bill, including the public, the electoral community, voluntary organisations, the Welsh Government and political parties. Their views have proved invaluable during that process and I would like to thank them all for their input to this work.

The National Assembly agreed in October 2018 that the Assembly Commission may introduce this Bill. As the Bill will require the support of at least a two thirds majority of Members for it to be passed, I will continue to engage with Members across the Siambr to seek a broad consensus on the Bill’s provisions going forward.

I will make an oral statement about the Bill to the National Assembly tomorrow. A copy of the Bill and its supporting documentation is available here:

* [Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill](http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/pri-ld12142/pri-ld12142-e.pdf)
* [Explanatory Memorandum, incorporating the Regulatory Impact Assessment and Explanatory Notes](http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/pri-ld12142-em/pri-ld12142-em-e.pdf)