

## WRITTEN STATEMENT

Title: Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform

Date: 1 February 2017

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

Following the Assembly's consent to the Wales Bill, the *Wales Act 2017* was passed by Parliament and received Royal Assent on 31 January 2017. It will finally give the Assembly the legislative powers to determine how best to represent the people of Wales and hold the Welsh Government to account.

The devolution of powers to the Assembly and a move to a reserved powers model signals a new constitutional basis for the Assembly, with important new responsibilities. The Assembly finally has autonomy over its own affairs to help make this institution a stronger, more accessible, inclusive and forward-looking legislature that delivers effectively for the people of Wales.

As a Commission, we agree wholeheartedly with our predecessors, who unanimously concluded in their January 2015 report *The Future of the Assembly and its capacity to deliver for Wales*, that "With only 60 Members, the National Assembly is under powered and over stretched".

On 14 November 2016 I announced the Assembly Commission's decision to take forward work to address the capacity of the Assembly, acting on behalf of the institution, with cross-party support and, most importantly, in the interests of the people of Wales.

To ensure that work is informed by robust, politically impartial, independent advice, I am announcing today that I have appointed an Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, to be chaired by Professor Laura McAllister CBE, Professor of Public Policy and the Governance of Wales at the Wales Governance Centre.



The Panel will report by autumn 2017. Its work will help us to decide what size our national legislature should be to best meet the needs of the people of Wales, how Members of that legislature should be elected, and whether the voting age should be lowered.

In addition to its Chair, Professor McAllister, the Panel membership will be:

- Professor Rosie Campbell – Professor of Politics, Birkbeck, University of London and Professor Sarah Childs – Professor of Politics and Gender, University of Bristol (joint membership)
- Rob Clements – former Director of Service Delivery at the House of Commons
- Professor David Farrell – Head, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin
- Dr Alan Renwick – Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit, University College London
- Sir Evan Paul Silk KCB – former Chair of the Commission on Devolution in Wales

I am delighted to be able to announce such an expert and highly qualified Panel. Between them they bring a wealth of expertise in the fields of electoral systems, parliamentary work and capacity, the constitutional position of the National Assembly, and wider issues of governance, including equalities, diversity and engagement. Their work will be vital to the Commission's efforts to reform the National Assembly for Wales and shape the future of Welsh democracy.

Nevertheless, such fundamental constitutional issues cannot be wholly separated from the political realities of representative democracy in Wales. Therefore, in addition to working closely with the First Minister and Welsh Government, I have invited the political parties currently represented in the Assembly to nominate representatives of a Political Reference Group, which I will chair. The Reference Group's role will be advisory; it will act as a sounding board for the Panel's emerging findings, and will help the Panel to ensure that its work culminates in



workable recommendations for reform that can be taken forward by the Assembly Commission and subject to public consultation.

The Terms of Reference for the Panel are:

- To review, and complement if necessary, the existing evidence and research relating to the size and electoral arrangements for the National Assembly;
- From that evidence base, and in order to inform the preparation of any necessary legislation, to make recommendations to the Assembly Commission on what should be the size of the membership of the National Assembly, the electoral system that should be used to elect its Members and the minimum voting age for National Assembly elections;
- The Expert Panel should report by autumn 2017 so that, provided the required degree of political support exists, any legislative changes could be made in time for the National Assembly election in 2021.

