



Dawn Bowden AM
Chair Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

5th of February 2020

Dear Dawn

Prospect Submission on the proposals for electoral reform in National Assembly for Wales

Thank you for inviting Prospect to comment on the proposals to potentially expand the number of assembly members as per the recommendations in the 2017 report, *A Parliament that Works for Wales*. I have consulted with my members and fellow trade union representatives and have laid out a summary of the Prospect position to these proposals below.

Prospect is a non-politically affiliated trade union and therefore we would not seek to actively endorse or oppose the increasing of the numbers of assembly members in the Welsh Assembly. We can though see the rationale of why this has been suggested. Prospect is fully supportive of the concept of devolution and the general constructive attitude taken by the Welsh Government towards Trade Unions and the wider industrial relations environment in Wales. We feel that this constructive approach leads to better outcomes for both employer and employee alike and this in turn provides better public services and a more positive work environment in both the private and public sectors.

In light of the above we think further devolution of powers to the Welsh Assembly is desirable and should be encouraged. We note the recent Justice in Wales for the People of Wales Report¹ and welcome the recommendations that more justice powers should be devolved to Wales. In addition to this with the Brexit position being unclear we are of the opinion that as many of the powers being repatriated from the EU should be passed straight to the devolved administrations and not rest in Westminster.

As stated above as we are politically neutral we feel that it is entirely a matter for the elected members of the assembly to decide if they wish to increase the number of

¹ https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/Justice%20Commission%20ENG%20DIGITAL_2.pdf

Assembly members and Prospect will be supportive of the Welsh Assembly and the work it is doing regardless of that choice.

We recognise though that for the reasons above the work load of the assembly is likely to increase. For a legislature to be effective it must have the resources to properly scrutinise legislation and while Prospect recognise the sterling effort carried out by Assembly members to date we feel it is not ideal for them having to sit in on 2 or 3 committees at a time, this must surely restrict the time each member can spend scrutinising legislation.

This relates to our primary concern with an increase in Assembly members and that is related to workload concerns that have been raised by our members in the Assembly itself and Welsh Government generally. Our members are proud of the work they do on behalf of the Welsh people but sometimes feel they have insufficient resources to carry out all of the work required of them by the Assembly. A particular example was highlighted to me below:

“Specifically within my profession there has been an increasing demand for evidence to support policy and yet our deputy director has had to fight hard for any additional resource and has succeeded in being given only a proportion of what we need. Demand would likely increase in line with an increase in AM’s and subsequent increase in Oral Assembly Question’s, requests for evidence etc.

At this moment in time in our division there are certain posts that haven’t been filled when they become vacant (due to person in post getting promotion or VES etc) and so requests for information or evidence relating to that topic get picked up eventually in a mop up and responded to in the quickest / briefest way possible – i.e. not with the highest level of quality or value added.

A specific example is an environmental post that has now been passed over to our branch without any additional resource. In the past this post used to produce at least four outputs per year that were of value and referred to, especially with the increasing concern over the environment. But now the outputs are not completed and requests for information are dealt with on a “who’s got capacity to pick up this one?” basis.

I still fail to understand how an increased demand from ministers runs alongside a decrease in resources and we would not want to see this disparity increase in future”

Welsh Government employee

A similar concern was raised by another member in relation to the potential Brexit impacts:

“In my Division we here have been front and centre of many negotiations with advice being required at unprecedentedly short notice. This has meant that we have often not had the luxury of who has capacity to pick this up as it is often only one person who knows the area, resulting in poor wellbeing, high stress and people leaving the Division. We also do not have the resource required to deal with this, are carrying many vacancies and are looking at potentially over 20 additional returning EU statutory functions that we will need to deliver. Therefore I echo that an increase in AMs would need to be reflected in increasing resource”

Welsh Government employee

Similar sentiments have been picked up from our wider membership generally across Welsh Government and Prospect are already arguing for sufficient resources to cope with the current requirements of the Welsh Assembly so any increase would have to be met with sufficient resource to allow our members to properly serve the people of Wales.

Our members in the Welsh Assembly are generally enthusiastic about an increase in the potential members of assembly members as they recognise that with the increase in legislative powers more assembly members are needed to properly fulfil those functions.

They have raised similar concerns about making sure that any corresponding increase in AM's are sufficiently resourced with adequate support staff, a particular concern was raised over the cap on head count in the assembly as it currently stands, if the number of AM's was to increase this surely needs to be revised. They have also raised more practical concerns over space in the Assembly. Currently they feel they are struggling for space with the arrangements as they stand and there are already requests for more office space for the existing AM's. If the number of AM's were to increase they feel more office space would be needed and would want to see a detailed plan of where the new AM's and the related staff would be based.

In summary Prospect and its members will continue to support and work with the Welsh Government whichever decision it decides to make and request that any increase in Assembly Members is sufficiently resourced to allow our members to carry out their work to the high standards they and the Welsh people expect.

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