

Date: 27 January 2020

Councillor Huw Thomas,
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Dear Huw,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 15 January 2020

Thank you for attending the above committee. On behalf of the Members, this letter captures the committee's agreed comments and observations following your briefing on the implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill.

Consultation response

We understand this Bill is the culmination of a number of White Papers as well as a Green Paper and we were assured that the Council has responded to all consultations. However we are unclear as to how the Council has fed into the Stage 1 consultation of the actual Bill. We note that the call for evidence closed on 3 January 2020 and the Council is not listed as a respondent. We therefore ask that you clarify how the Council has responded to the call for evidence. If it has not responded then we wish to understand how and why that decision was taken and by whom? What mechanisms do you plan to use to feed the Council's comments into consideration of the Bill as it progresses through the Assembly?

Corporate joint committees

During the scrutiny meeting you commended the engagement Local Authorities have had with Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government and indicated that you are committed to working constructively with the WLGA, particularly on the Bill's proposal to enable corporate joint committees. We concur with your concern regarding the voting structure within such a proposed body, one vote for one Council irrespective of its number of residents is not a representative or proportionate approach to decision making. We consider it important to ensure this Cardiff Council view is placed on record as the Bill is considered by various Assembly Committees.

Webcasting

We have concerns about the proposal to require webcasting of all Council meetings which are open to the public, given the potential cost implications for the Council and the paucity of viewers for some meetings. Our observation is that it is possible there has been an over estimation of public interest in the Council and in committee business. Similarly we suggest that remote attendance by councillors, whilst clearly a benefit for those Councils covering large geographical areas such as Powys, is less appropriate to Cardiff and will pose a particular challenge where a vote is expected on a matter under discussion.

Self-assessment & peer review

In respect of the Performance and Governance element of the Bill, which proposes taking self-assessment and peer review to another level, we note that this implies that the next Council Administration will take part in a peer review during its term. We concur that such a review will need to be rigorous and as such should not be confined to Welsh insight and expertise. We note that the WLGA will be a focus for advice and the sourcing of relevant expertise which is likely to extend beyond Welsh Local Authorities.

Focussing on the self-assessment requirements within the Bill, the Committee is itself currently developing a model to capture the impact of scrutiny on the delivery of Council services. We note your caution in confusing the implementation of recommendations with high quality scrutiny. The issue of substantiveness of recommendations features strongly in the model being drafted for the Committee, then Cabinet's consideration. I hope to make a number of proposals regarding self-assessment by scrutiny committees, and also within directorates in respect of the implementation of scrutiny recommendations that have been accepted.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended the PRAP Scrutiny Committee to brief us on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. I would be grateful if you would advise us how the Council will feed the committee's observations into the Council's own response to the ongoing consultation, and therefore look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Walker', with a stylized, cursive script.

COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Paul Orders, Chief Executive
Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships
Dylan Owen, Head of the Cabinet Office
Debbie Said, Cabinet Support Officer
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager