

## **INQUIRY INTO E-PETITIONS**

**Organisation:** National Assembly for Wales  
**Name:** Ms Elin Jones AM  
**Date received:** 26 May 2017

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**Elin Jones AC, Llywydd**

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

**Elin Jones AM, Presiding Officer**

National Assembly for Wales

The Honourable John Ajaka MLC  
President  
New South Wales Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney  
NSW 2000

Your ref:  
Our ref: PO180/EJ/GF

25 May 2017

Dear Mr Ajaka

### **Inquiry into e-petitions**

Thank you for your letter of 13 April seeking the experience of the National Assembly for Wales (the Assembly) in relation to e-petitions.

### **Establishing an e-petitions system**

The Assembly introduced an e-petitions system in 2007. A Petitions Committee was established at the same time in order to provide a route for formal consideration of all admissible petitions.

Prior to that time, the Assembly had received a small number of petitions (approximately 50 over 8 years). However, in the absence of a formal system for their consideration, the majority of petitions were treated as Ministerial correspondence.

The decision to establish an e-petitions system, and a dedicated committee to consider them, was taken with the intention of providing a direct way for members of the public and organisations to submit policy proposals and to influence the subjects discussed in the Assembly.

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg / We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru**

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1NA

Llywydd@cynulliad.cymru

www.cynulliad.cymru

0300 200 7403

**National Assembly for Wales**

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1NA

Llywydd@assembly.wales

www.assembly.wales

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## **Procedures for accepting petitions**

The main provisions governing the Assembly's public petitions procedure are set out in the Standing Orders of the Assembly (specifically Standing Order 23). This is supported by a more detailed Determination on the Proper Form of Petitions, which is available on the Assembly's website: <http://www.assembly.wales/en/gethome/e-petitions/how-to-petition/Pages/PO-Determination-Petitions.aspx>

A brief summary of the key elements of the process follows.

- Petitions may be submitted on paper or electronically. An e-petitions system on the Assembly's website is available for this purpose.
- Petitions must be submitted by a named individual or organisation who must supply a primary address in Wales.
- The admissibility of petitions is assessed by the Clerk of the Petitions Committee (under a delegation from the Presiding Officer) according to a set of criteria. This takes place prior to the collection of signatures wherever possible. The key elements of the admissibility criteria state that petitions **must not**:
  - ask the Assembly to do anything which it clearly has no power to do (in particular, petitions about matters that are not devolved to Wales are not admissible);
  - ask the Assembly to intervene in the operational decisions or actions of local authorities, including planning decisions;
  - ask the Assembly to adjudicate, arbitrate or mediate personal or commercial interests;
  - concern matters that are 'sub judice';
  - be the same, or substantially similar to, a petition which was closed less than a year earlier;
  - contain language which is offensive, intemperate, or provocative.

Once an admissible petition has collected a minimum of 50 signatures, and has closed for signatures, it is referred to the Petitions Committee. The Committee is then solely responsible for determining the appropriate course of action in relation to all petitions and has a similar range of powers to other scrutiny committees of the Assembly. The lead petitioner(s) are given an opportunity to engage with the Committee and provide further information at all stages. Once the Petitions Committee is satisfied that the petition has either achieved its aim or cannot be progressed any further it will close the petition.



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## **Public engagement**

Over 700 petitions have been considered by the Petitions Committee to date. Petitions have been submitted from across the full diversity of Welsh society and on a wide range of devolved subjects.

Whilst we have not undertaken a detailed evaluation of the petitions system, a review of the process conducted in late 2015 demonstrated that the majority of respondents valued the process and previous petitioners were largely satisfied with the consideration given to their petition.

Petitions have also resulted in a number of changes to policy and public services in Wales, perhaps most notably in the case of the introduction of a charge on the use of single use carrier bags in Wales. This proposal was first raised through a petition before it was the subject of Welsh Government legislation in 2013.

Perhaps most importantly, the petitions process has become an important tool in our outreach work and efforts to increase public awareness of the Assembly and devolution within the United Kingdom.

## **Implementation**

I am not able to provide an accurate assessment of the capital impact of implementing an e-petition mechanism. This is due to the time that has passed since our system was introduced and the fact that various amendments have been made in the intervening period using IT software already used for a range of Assembly functions. Therefore I do not believe that any estimates we would be able to provide would be a reliable indicator for your purposes.

I hope that this response will be of assistance to your inquiries. If you require any further information please feel free to contact Graeme Francis, Clerk of the Petitions Committee, directly on [Graeme.francis@assembly.wales](mailto:Graeme.francis@assembly.wales).

Yours sincerely

Elin Jones AM  
Llywydd