



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**WRITTEN STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

TITLE **The Mathias Review – summary of progress**

DATE **12 December 2013**

BY **Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business**

The Mathias Review, published in June 2011, was carried out following concerns about delays in the then Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (“the Commission”) timetable for conducting electoral reviews, its methodology and the capacity of the Commission to deliver its objectives. Glyn Mathias was appointed in March 2011 by my predecessor Carl Sargeant AM to carry out the review. Mr Mathias recruited Max Caller and Peter Mackay, respective Chairs of the English and Scottish Local Government Boundary Commissions, to assist him. Their report can be accessed here:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/publications/mathiasreview/?lang=en>

Mathias concluded the Commission had failed to deliver on an unrealistic timetable which it should not have agreed to, had produced unacceptable proposals, had lost the confidence of its stakeholders and was, therefore, no longer fit for purpose.

The then Minister for Local Government and Communities subsequently terminated the appointments of the three Commissioners and their Secretary.. He then established an interim Commission under the leadership of Max Caller and appointed a temporary Secretary. Six months later the current Commissioners –

Owen Watkin (Chair), David Powell and Ceri Stradling – were appointed on a long term basis following normal public appointments procedures. After a period of interim Secretaries, the Welsh Government is now in the process of recruiting a permanent Chief Executive to what is now the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, since the coming into force of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013.

There were a large number of recommendations and next steps proposed by Mathias. The Welsh Government, this Assembly and the Commission itself have all responded to these. My purpose in publishing this statement today is to demonstrate I am satisfied the process of reform of the Commission, its policies and practices is now fundamentally completed.

Mathias proposed the Commission needed to significantly improve its consultative procedures, explaining clearly its proposed methodology. They have responded to this by introducing consultative procedures which fully engage with the main stakeholders and interested parties and have published documents explaining their approach to the appropriate number of Councillors and also a detailed programme of their forthcoming electoral reviews.

The review also called on the Welsh Government to examine the structure and staffing of the Commission and its managerial approach. As a result of close co-operation between Welsh Government officials, the Commission and its staff, the Commission has become an organisation which is efficient, as recognised in positive audit reports, and outward looking. It has moved to new, more cost-effective premises at Hastings House, which I was pleased to visit in July. They have regular, minuted, liaison meetings with Welsh Government officials, an audit committee with an independent member and up to date policies on promoting diversity, sustainable procurement, records management and access to information, amongst others.

The main response from the Welsh Government to Mathias was, of course, embedded within the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013, which underwent full scrutiny by the Assembly during its legislative process. Mathias had pointed out limitations on the Commission's flexibility imposed by the previous legislative framework. The Act modernised the rules governing the process of electoral reviews, removing barriers identified by Mathias and instituting a process of continual cycles of electoral reviews in each ten year period.

In my view, the Commission has now fully recovered from the difficult situation of two years ago and is now well-placed to carry out its important role in helping to ensure fairness in local democracy. I do not, therefore, intend to provide any further responses to the Mathias review and would like to place on record my thanks to Glyn Mathias and his colleagues for the valuable work they did in helping the Commission to get back onto a firm footing.