

Written Statement

The Co-operation Agreement – Senedd Business

Further to my statements on 1 and 7 December about the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, I have considered further the impact of the Agreement on Senedd Business and in particular the novel role of Designated Members. I have discussed the position with members of the Business Committee and am also grateful to those Members who have contacted me with their own views.

While the legal advice makes it clear that Plaid Cymru is not a group with an executive role, Plaid Cymru remains an opposition party in the Senedd, but now also co-operates with the Welsh Government on an agreed policy programme. It has termed itself co-opposition. I am seeking here to reflect this novel role more appropriately in Senedd Business. Designated Members and the Leader of Plaid Cymru will have access to information and involvement in joint decision-making relating to the areas covered by the Agreement. This raises questions about the role of Plaid Cymru, and in particular Designated Members, in the scrutiny functions of the Senedd. I welcome Plaid Cymru's commitment to publish details of Designated Members and their areas of responsibility.

It will take time for the impact of the Agreement to become fully apparent, but I intend to use my discretion to make the following adjustments to plenary business from the start of the Spring term:

- The Leader of Plaid Cymru will continue to be able to ask 3 questions without notice to the First Minister each week, although I would not expect those questions to be used to promote any policy areas covered by the Agreement. Questions to any Ministers should focus on scrutiny, as such I expect the Leader of Plaid Cymru to frame questions accordingly. I also intend to explore further with the Business Committee how to facilitate



scrutiny of Designated Members and the Leader of Plaid Cymru by the Senedd, possibly in the case of the Leader on a monthly basis, in place of the Leader's questions to the First Minister;

- The number of questions without notice by Plaid Cymru spokespeople will be limited to 2 per Ministerial question session;
- Designated Members will not be called to ask Spokespeople Questions;
- The Leader of Plaid Cymru and Designated Members will not be able to ask questions (tabled or supplementary) or contribute to statements on subjects other than in relation to constituency or regional matters. The Leader of Plaid Cymru may contribute to statements by the First Minister;
- Designated Members and the Leader of Plaid Cymru may contribute to debates, but I expect them to declare any interests and to exercise judgment on what might be appropriate given their roles under the Agreement.
- The ratio of opposition debate time allocated to Plaid Cymru will be reduced by the number of Designated Members (including the Leader of Plaid Cymru), with the time freed-up through this reallocated to non-group activity such as Member debates.

I will protect the rights of the Conservative group and Liberal Democrat party, such as continuing to call Conservative Members first. As has been my practice the Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats is guaranteed a contribution on question sessions. The order of other speakers will reflect an appropriate balance between Labour backbenchers and Plaid Cymru.

While the operation of committees is a matter for the Business Committee, it is my view as Llywydd that Designated Members should not chair any committees or be members of committees that cover their area of responsibility under the Agreement. This could be a particular issue for cross-cutting committees such as Finance, Public Accounts and Public Administration and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee. I recognise that Senedd committees may wish to scrutinise the Leader or Designated Members on the Agreement, which they have the power to do if they wish.

Business Committee considered the allocation of the chair of the Finance Committee to the Plaid Cymru group given their commitment to a long-term budget agreement. In the absence of a majority for change in the Business Committee the status quo remains. My own view as Llywydd is that the integrity

of the budget process would be better maintained if the committee were not chaired by a member of a group that has entered into a budget agreement with the Welsh Government. This is in no way a reflection on the current chair, whom all Members hold in high regard.

The arrangements above are immediate, incremental changes to our plenary meetings to address issues arising from the Agreement.

As I acknowledged previously, as an evolving democracy we should be prepared to govern in different ways which work in the interests of the people of Wales and I welcome any move by political parties that seeks to bring together different views for common good.

As a Senedd, we will explore whether to make any longer-term changes to our custom, practice and procedures to reflect the novel nature of this Agreement. I will continue to keep matters under review as the practical operation of the Agreement develops next year.

Elin Jones MS
Llywydd

15 December 2021