



Citizens' Assembly  
of Scotland  
Seanadh nan  
Saoranach de dh'Alba

Kate Wimpres  
Convener  
Email: [Redacted S.38(i)(b)]

Michael Russell MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs  
Scottish Government  
St. Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

1 July 2020

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

**Reconvening the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland – proposals from the secretariat**

Following our recent exchange of letters I am pleased to share with you a proposal, prepared by the Secretariat, for the Assembly to reconvene and complete its work, including a revised estimate of the resources required. Key elements of the proposal have been discussed with our Stewarding Group and with Assembly members' reference groups.

The proposal provides for the Assembly to reconvene on an on-line basis in September following a rigorous period of preparation, testing and training in the use of the technology over the summer, and for it to conclude in early December with outputs to be published before the end of the year.

The proposal summarises our engagement with members over the period and the work we have done to review contractual arrangements and assess the range of technical options for reconvening the Assembly. As noted below, the proposal identifies the changes we think are required to the remit and terms of reference to reflect the changed circumstances, including to ensure that the Assembly adds its voice to the discussion about COVID renewal as agreed in our earlier correspondence.

Under the proposal the Assembly will meet in virtual session over 4 weekends. This reflects advice that on-line working must be significantly less intensive than a face to face Assembly. The total time in formal Assembly session as a result of this will be less overall than 2 face to face weekends, but it is a significant additional time commitment nonetheless and we do not think it is reasonable to ask more of members. Proceedings will be conducted through ZOOM and will cover the taking of evidence and Q&A, facilitated deliberation between members, and the preparation of outputs and decision-making. This approach is based on a technical delivery proposal prepared by our design contractors according to a specification which

required the presentation of a range of options against key requirements such as cost, security, practicalities for members and reliability. Our contractors have extensive experience of on-line citizen engagement and the preferred approach draws heavily on the successful on-line delivery of the UK Climate Assembly, which was led by one of the design team partner organisations.

My view is that a small number of mainly technical adjustments to the Assembly terms of reference are required to enable us to complete our work. These adjustments are described in detail in the proposal. Should the Government agree the proposal I would suggest an acknowledgement in correspondence of the refreshed scope together with making those technical adjustments would be appropriate.

I should draw your attention in particular to the provisions of the terms of reference relating to the maximum number of Assembly members and the requirement that they be broadly representative of the wider Scottish population. Notwithstanding their hard work and commitment to date it may not be practicable for some members to continue to participate given the change in time-scale and approach to delivery. We will be working hard to retain members, including through ensuring that proceedings are accessible to everyone and they are supported to build the skills and confidence to participate effectively in an on-line Assembly.

Monitoring and reporting on the Assembly membership so that it can be seen to be broadly representative of the wider population will be important. It may be appropriate to make provision for that in the terms of reference. The Secretariat will continue to work with statistical and research experts to undertake that monitoring and reporting through to the end of the Assembly.

Moving the Assembly on-line offers opportunities for financial savings, given that we have successfully negotiated a refund of the costs of the cancelled events, which off-set additional design and delivery costs. The current estimated budget requirement for the current financial year to complete the Assembly is around £290,000, which is broadly similar to earlier estimates. On this basis and taking into account expenditure to date, overall out-turn for the Assembly would be around £1.043 million, which is of course substantially lower than the £1.365 million original budget allocation.

The key assumptions and changes which underpin this estimate are set out in the budget annex to the proposal, but there are a couple of matters that I would draw to your attention as outlined below.

A members' reference group made strong representations about the importance of compensating members for the additional responsibility of meeting over 4 shorter weekends. There is of course an entirely reasonable argument to be made that the existing honorarium reflects the actual time commitment. However, it seems likely that the view in the reference group would be shared by a number of members. A modest uplift would provide welcome recognition of the additional responsibility being taken on by members and send a strong signal of the Government's commitment to the process. It could help to ensure member retention. We have incorporated an additional gift of thanks overall of £200 for each member within our budget estimates. That means that each member who participates in all 4 on-line weekends will receive an honorarium of £600 in addition to the total of £800 for attendance at weekends 1-4.

The budget also includes provision for a final face-to-face celebration event to be held at the Golden Jubilee in the New Year should circumstances allow that. You will understand that for members the personal relationships built through the work to date are really important and they will wish to come together at the end of the process to celebrate the journey. Our view is that it is essential that we should plan on the basis of such an event.

Whilst we have made provision for a face-to-face celebration event in the New Year we are mindful of the fact that if rapid progress on tackling COVID continues to be made - such as to enable the holding of large-scale events - then Assembly members would expect some of our formal proceedings to be conducted face to face rather than on-line. The Secretariat is undertaking contingency planning, recognising that any face-

to-face activity would have to come towards the end of proceedings, incorporate final celebrations and enable delivery of final outputs still to be produced by the end of the year. There would be certain additional costs associated with such a face-to-face event, but these would not be substantially beyond those included in the current estimates.

In light of the wider financial situation we have stripped back our thinking on legacy activity and included provision only for estimated costs associated with launching the Assembly outputs and presenting them to decision-makers, including attendance by group of members. The Secretariat has developed some initial proposals on wider legacy work which we would of course be happy to share should the Government consider such activity would be appropriate.

Finally, I should point out that we are still in discussion with the design team about technical aspects of the delivery proposal, although the key elements of that are agreed and are reflected in this estimate. I am assured that the additional costs outlined here are the minimum that is required to deliver the Assembly. We have offset some of this uplift by reducing our expenditure on other contracts, notably on media and PR services.

I hope this proposal is clear and the budget estimate and proposed adjustments to our terms of reference meets your approval. I would of course be happy to discuss any aspect as necessary. Once these matters have been agreed I will write to the political parties represented in the parliament and to the Presiding Officer alerting them to the fact that the Assembly is to reconvene and how we will take our work forward. I appreciate that you may wish to engage with the parties as you review our proposals and am content that you draw on any of this material for that purpose.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted S.38(i)(b)]

Kate Wimpess