

Russell George AM/AC

Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Natural Resources
Gweinidog yr Wrthblaid dros Amaethyddiaeth ac Adnoddau Naturiol

National Assembly Member for Montgomeryshire
Aelod Cynulliad dros Sir Drefaldwyn

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru
National
Assembly for
Wales



Our Ref: RG/CLC/220514

Mr David Melding AM
Chair of the Constitution and Legislative Affairs Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

22 May 2014

Dear David

Re: Inquiry into disqualification of membership from the National Assembly for Wales

I am pleased to have the opportunity to formally submit written evidence to the Constitution and Legislative Affairs Committee in relation to its inquiry into the disqualification of membership from the National Assembly for Wales. Moreover in addition to this written evidence, I would of course be more than prepared to give oral evidence to the Committee if so requested.

I am one of just a small number of Members elected to the National Assembly that also hold a dual mandate from the Welsh electorate at both local authority and national level. I will not go into the legislative niceties that underpin the debate of dual representation (or so called 'double jobbing'), as the Committee will undoubtedly investigate all associated legislation on this issue and come to its own conclusions. However, I would like to put on record my perspectives of dual representation and how in my own personal perspective, they not only complement each other but they enhance my ability to advocate and support all the residents of the Montgomeryshire no matter where they live.

I was first elected to public office at local authority level in 2008. When I was elected to the National Assembly for Wales in 2011, I was extremely conscious of the work and time commitments required to perform the role of Assembly Member to the highest standards expected both by the institution and by the local electorate. As someone who runs his own retail business, I was used to managing my work and time commitments of business with local elected office. However on being elected to the Assembly, I immediately had to put in management provision to take over the day-to-day running of my business and it was also at that point that I started to give careful consideration as to whether or not I could effectively undertake two elected roles.

As an elective representative, what is in my mind at all times is what is in the best interests of the voter and that is of course amplified when you hold two elected roles. What I wanted to

ensure during the process of making those considerations, was what levels of service the electorate could expect from me within each of my elected roles and most importantly, whether they had the confidence that I could effectively deliver for them undertaking both roles. I knew I had about 9-10 months to make that judgement before candidates were to be selected for Local Government elections in 2012, so I pragmatically continued to work at both roles to see if it was achievable and to see if there were any natural synergies that would bring both roles closer together.

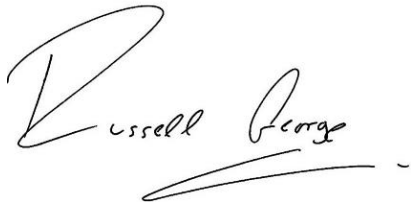
As I began to receive and the progress through a growing casework postbag, I could see that a large majority of the cases that I was dealing with were issues relating to Powys County Council and I have to say that trend has continued. There was a clear overlap of work streams in relation to constituency casework. Therefore, having more direct access to local authority portfolio holders and officers, in both an official and unofficial capacity, has aided my ability to represent and deliver for my constituents in my Assembly role. Moreover, having direct access to local authority documents, emails and communications has also ensured my knowledge base is kept up to date and allows me to disseminate any key messages to constituents swiftly and efficiently.

Conversely that work dynamic also operates in reverse. In having more direct access to Welsh Government Ministers, to have the ability to scrutinise and ask questions of the Government on a daily basis, has allowed me to feedback key information to the local authority and to individual councillors themselves. This arrangement aids the Council's governance decision making process and affords County Councillors the opportunity to raise particular pieces of casework with me that have a more national focus.

I have to say it is not always easy to manage the two workloads, which are sometimes competing and conflicting. I rely heavily on extremely efficient and competent members of my Assembly staff team, to effectively manage my Assembly casework with Powys County Council and ensure that there are appropriate Chinese Walls in place where my local authority casework may potentially conflict with my Assembly work; I have to say that process works well. The other issue which is difficult to manage is fulfilling the meeting commitments of both the National Assembly and Powys County Council. It is impossible to maintain maximum attendance at all the relevant meetings of both institutions because of competing business and because of the geographic distance between Cardiff and Llandrindod Wells. In my view, each institution has equal status because they are equally important for the voters I represent. However, when a conflict does emerge, I examine the issues on both business agendas and I have to make a judgement call using a utilitarian interest test. The interests of my constituents are of course paramount, however being elected to a national legislature brings with it wider responsibilities for the national good. Therefore in the main, the balance does tend to tilt towards contributing to National Assembly business but that judgement is made on a meeting by meeting basis.

I understand that maintaining this representational balance would not suit everyone but the arrangement works well for me and it helps improve my ability to deliver for the people who have elected me. Ultimately I believe it should be for the voters to decide whether or not they are content for an individual to hold both local and national office.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russell George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Russell George AM

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