

## AGENDA ITEM 10

### RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

#### COUNCIL

20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2017

#### WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION: ELECTORAL REFORM IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WALES: - DRAFT RESPONSE

#### JOINT REPORT OF THE SECRETARY TO THE CABINET AND HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS COUNCILLORS A MORGAN AND M WEBBER.

Authors: C Hanagan, Service Director and Secretary to the Cabinet.  
K May, Head of Democratic Services

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with details of the Working Group's discussions in respect of the Welsh Government Consultation: Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales and provide Members with a draft response for Members comment.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council:
- (i) Note the comments of the Working Group's as outlined within appendix A and B of the report;
  - (ii) Agree the draft response as outlined within Appendix C of the report (subject to any amendments made at the meeting).

#### 3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to provide a response to Welsh Government on the Consultation by the 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017.

#### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On the 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Mark Drakeford, launched a consultation document entitled: "Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales."



4.2 In light of the relevant provisions of the Wales Act 2017 coming into force in 2018, the consultation broadly seeks to obtain views on electoral and registration arrangements in Wales, with the ultimate goal of increasing turnout and promoting competition at elections. The consultation document is attached at Appendix D.

4.3 At the Full Council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, it was agreed that two Working Groups of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet be established to consider the consultation document. The comments emanating from both Working Groups would then form the basis of the Council's full response to be submitted by 10<sup>th</sup> October.

## **5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no equality or diversity implications attached to the consultation

## **6 CONSULTATION**

- Council – 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2017
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2017
- Cabinet Working Group – 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2017

## **7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

There are no financial implications aligned to this report

## **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

There are no legal implications aligned to this report

## **9 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.**

There are no links to the above priorities contained in this report

## **10 CONCLUSION**

The draft response identifies some key potential developments in the attempt to create a healthier democracy in Wales in accordance with the proposals consulted on by the Welsh Government



**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***  
Overview & Scrutiny.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2017**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE SECRETARY TO THE CABINET AND HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNCILLORS A MORGAN AND M WEBBER.**

Item: Welsh Government Consultation: Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales: - Draft Response

**Background Papers**

- Welsh Government Consultation: Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales
- Minute 40 –Council 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2017

**APPENDIX A**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes** of the Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Wednesday, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 at 4 p.m.

**PRESENT**

County Borough Councillor L.M.Adams – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors**

J.Bonetto  
J.Brencher  
J.Harries  
D.Macey  
G.P.Thomas

**Non Committee Members in Attendance**

County Borough Councillors J.Williams and R.Yeo  
Mr.C.Jones – Representing GMB (Co-opted Member)  
Mrs.S.Jones – Elected Parent/Governor Representative (Co-opted Member)

**Officers in Attendance**

Mr.C.B.Jones – Director, Legal & Democratic Services  
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors E.George, P.Jarman, J.James, E.Stephens and M.Diamond (non Committee Member) and the Education Co-opted Members – Mr.J.Fish and Mr.S.Jones.

**WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION – ELECTORAL REFORM IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and indicated that an invitation to this meeting had been extended to all Non Executive Members and Education Co-opted Members.

Following the meeting of Council held on the 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, Members views were sought on the above Welsh Government Consultation document in order that their comments/views could be reported to full Council on the 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2017 in readiness for the Council's response to be made by the 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017.

To assist Members in making their comments, as shown below, to the 46 questions posed by the Welsh Government a PowerPoint presentation was made by the Head of Democratic Services:-

- 1. Do you agree that the qualifying age for voting in Welsh local government elections should be lowered to 16?**  
Yes, subject to 16 year olds also being able to vote at all Welsh local government elections including the Welsh Assembly elections and Town/Community Councils. Members were also of the view that whilst politics is included on the curriculum at secondary schools it should be promoted further and not just on social media.
- 2. Should EU Citizens who move to Wales once the UK has left the EU continue to acquire the right to vote?**  
Yes, however there should be a caveat that the individuals concerned should have been in the country for at least two years and as 1 above for all Welsh elections.
- 3. Should voting rights be extended to all legal residents in Wales, irrespective of their nationality or citizenry?**  
Yes, and as in 2 above, there should be a caveat that the individuals concerned should have been in the country for at least two years and again to be included in all Welsh elections.
- 4. EU and Commonwealth citizens can stand for election to local government in Wales, should this continue and be extended to all nationalities made eligible to vote?**  
Yes, as they contribute to the economy and again to include all Welsh elections.
- 5. Should Electoral Registration Officers have a greater range of sources available to them to assist citizens to be added to the register?**  
Yes, for example, as there are many individuals in receipt of benefits and other sources of income support and therefore these addresses should be known to Electoral Registration Officers.
- 6. Which data sources do you think should be used by Electoral Registration Officers?**  
As 5 above, and to also include Passports and every other resource available to the authority and should also be able to access the Census records and GPs Surgery lists.
- 7. Should a wider range of local authority staff be empowered to assist citizens to obtain registration through access to the local government register and have the ability to amend it?**  
Yes, subject to the necessary documentary evidence being available e.g. passports, national insurance numbers and there should be a checking process in place. This could be accommodated at libraries, One4All centres,

Sports centre, on-line and the final checking to be undertaken at the central point within Electoral Services.

**8. What controls should be put in place to ensure the Electoral Registration Officer maintains overall control of the register?**

Please see 7 above.

**9. Should the individual registration rules be relaxed to allow for block registration in certain circumstances, protecting the right to vote for populations otherwise at risk of exclusion?**

Already systems in place to cover Residential/Nursing Homes and Women's Refuges.

**10. Should we place a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to consider whether any individual groups within their electoral area should be specifically targeted in registration?**

There are already processes in place to target non respondents. However, an updated Census should be provided to local authorities also need to look at missing groups such as those living in housing association dwellings and those families within the Armed forces who do not register to vote. All individuals should be encouraged to use their vote and with the option to abstain, if they so wished.

Members were further of the view, that those individuals who do not register to vote should be taken to Court.

It was also suggested that instead of an Electoral Register it be renamed to Citizens or Residents List.

**11. Should we introduce arrangements so that agencies who are aware of people moving have a duty to inform the Electoral Registration Officers?**

Yes, e.g. Estate Agents, Doctors Surgeries and Schools.

**12. What are your views on the development of a single electronic register for Wales?**

Further clarity was needed. Members were of the view that decisions are made, sometimes on incorrect information e.g. electoral boundaries and again as in previous responses, information is held at Newport in respect of the Census. Members were also concerned that this would be costly and who would be accountable?

**13. Do you agree that individual principal councils should be able to choose their voting system?**

No, as it would be very confusing for all concerned and leads to indecisive government. Simplicity and transparency is needed in all areas and therefore there should be no choice other than First Past the Post.

- 14. Do you agree that a constitutional change such as this should be subject to a two-thirds majority?**  
To make everything equal, the Welsh Assembly elections should also be First Past the Post.
- 15. Do you agree that the term of local government in Wales should be set at five years?**  
Yes.
- 16. Do you agree in principle with the desirability of reforming the voting system to encourage greater participation?**  
Yes, subject to the necessary safeguards being put in place. The choice of electronic voting or postal voting is already in place with certain Political Groups such as Labour and the Unions. To encourage greater participation voting places such as supermarkets could be used.
- 17. Are there other initiatives not covered which might be taken to enable greater participation in elections in Wales?**  
The majority of Members were of the view that compulsory voting should be enforced and people fined if they do not use their vote. There should also be a box included on the ballot paper for abstentions. It is the responsibility of those individuals who are absent to inform the Electoral Registration Officer with documentary evidence.  
Again, education is a must and people need to be encouraged to use their vote.
- 18. Should councils be able to choose to use all-postal voting at council elections?**  
A pilot exercise should be undertaken in the first instance and then rolled out if found to be successful. The system could be used in a by-election.
- 19. Should it be subject to pilot exercises first?**  
As in 18 above, however Members were of the view that this question should be Question 18.
- 20. Should councils be able to operate all postal voting in an individual ward or a number of wards within a council area?**  
Same response as outlined in 18 and 19 above.
- 21. Should electronic voting be enabled at local elections?**  
Yes
- 22. Should remote voting be enabled at local elections?**  
Yes, and also look at the possibility of an App being installed on mobile devices for those individuals who are out of the area at the time of voting.
- 23. Should electronic counting be introduced for local elections in Wales?**  
Yes, once electronic voting has been tried and tested.



- 24. Should mobile polling stations be enabled at local elections?**  
Yes, provided it links into the central office.
- 25. Should we enable returning officers to make use of polling places in addition to fixed polling stations?**  
Yes, provided there is sufficient technical support and accessible voting stations.
- 26. Should we enable local elections to be held on more than one day and on days other than a Thursday?**  
Yes, especially a Sunday.
- 27. Should consideration be given to simplifying postal voting procedures and literature?**  
Yes.
- 28. How do you think the process could be simplified?**  
Postal votes should be more user friendly and the introduction of electronic voting systems.
- 29. Should electors attending a polling station be required to produce ID before they are allowed to vote? If so, what types of identification should be accepted?**  
No, as some individuals do not possess a passport or a driving licence.
- 30. Do the advantages of requiring ID outweigh the risk of deterring voters?**  
No.
- 31. Do you agree that it should no longer be necessary to publish a candidate's home address in election literature, including anything published electronically?**  
No, such information should be published.
- 32. Do you agree that each candidate should be required to provide a personal statement for inclusion on a website provided by the authority to whom they are seeking election?**  
No as the person responsible for publishing the statement would not know if the information was correct. This would be a costly and timely exercise.
- 33. Do you agree that it should not be permissible to serve both as an Assembly Member and Councillor?**  
Yes and caveats in place that the individual should stand down from one of the positions if elected to both.
- 34. Do you agree that candidates should be required to disclose a party affiliation if they have one?**  
Yes.

- 35. What sort of evidence should be required to suggest there is an undisclosed party affiliation?**  
Party logo and Party name.
- 36. Should any council staff below senior level be able to stand for election to their own authority?**  
Yes, but if elected should then resign and not have to resign during the election period.
- 37. Is there still justification for councils to keep a list of those other than senior officers who should be politically restricted?**  
Yes.
- 38. Do you agree that the statutory chief executive role should include that of returning officer?**  
No as members were of the view that it is the role of the Legal Officer/Monitoring Officer.
- 39. Do you agree that any addition to salary in recognition of returning officer duties should be a matter for the local authority to determine?**  
No, it should be a national fee system.
- 40. Should Welsh Government move to a system in calculating Assembly election costs on an agreed formula, based on the size of electorate?**  
Yes, systems should be simplified.
- 41. Should Welsh prisoners be allowed to register to vote and participate in Welsh local government elections? If so, should it be limited to those sentences to less than twelve months, four years or any sentence length?**  
No the right to vote should be suspended until such time as the person is released.
- However, Members were concerned about those individuals who were disenfranchised from voting e.g. those who are homeless.
- 42. By what method should prisoners cast a vote?**  
Systems should not be put in place as prisoners should not be allowed to vote.
- 43. At what address should prisoners be registered to vote?**  
As 42 above.
- 44. We would like to know your views on the effects that electoral reform would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English?**

**What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?**

Welsh language legislation is already in place where all Welsh authorities have a statutory duty to adhere to.

- 45. Please also explain how you believe the proposed options could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourable than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?**

As 44 above.

- 46. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:**

As referred to earlier, consideration be given to the Electoral Registration being renamed to Citizens or Residents List and to those individuals who are disenfranchised from voting.

**L.M.ADAMS  
CHAIR**

**The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.**



**OFFICIAL ATTENDANCE OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCILS CABINET COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP**

**ELECTORAL REFORM.**

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee Working Group – Electoral reform” on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September, at 2pm at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale.

**County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

(Mrs) M Webber – Chairman

R Bevan

A Crimmings

G E Hopkins

J Rosser

M Norris

R Lewis

C Leyshon

**Officers in Attendance**

Mr C Hanagan – Service Director, Cabinet & Public Relation (Secretary to the Cabinet)

Mrs E Wilkins – Cabinet Business Officer

**1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST.**

In accordance with RCT Council’s Code of Conduct there were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

**2 WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION – ELECTORAL REFORM IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Chairman thanked both Members and officers for attending the meeting and particular thanks was given to the Service Director, Cabinet & Public Relation for the preparatory work undertaken in advance of the meeting.

The Service Director commenced by reminding Members of the decision taken at Council on the 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2017 regarding the formulation of a response to the Welsh Government in respect of the Electoral Reform consultation document, with views being sought by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet Working Group before being reported back to Council on the 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2017. He added that the deadline for submission of the Council’s response to Welsh Government was 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017.

Members were advised that the Consultation document contained 47 questions but to assist Members with their responses the report before them had been structured around the Consultation documents main themes and with agreement of the Chair it was agreed to consider each theme as outlined within the report.

## 2.(a) **Building The Franchise**

Members provided their views in respect of extending the franchise to incorporate 16 year olds, votes for foreign national and votes for prisoners.

- Members were in support of lowering the voting age to 16 but were conscious of the need for education and awareness in respect of both Local and National politics as well as the best approaches available for engaging with young people, commenting on the potential use of School Councils.
- Members discussed in detail the proposal in respect of the right of prisoners to vote and the potential options that could be taken forward, including restricting the right to those prisoners convicted of violent offences only and the potential of excluding those prisoners on remand if certain proposals were taken forward. Following discussions the majority of Members agreed that the right to vote should not be awarded to prisoners.
- In respect of Voting for foreign nationals, Members were keen to protect the existing rights of those residents already in the UK, before the final Brexit settlement.

## 2.(b) **Voter Registration**

Members discussed the consultation documents suggestions in respect of registration arrangements, registration campaigns, automatic registration and a single electronic register.

- Members spoke in support of any arrangement that would increase voting through electoral registration and also commented on financial penalties taken forward if people did not register to vote.
- Members queried the Service Director in respect of current registration campaigns and Members were advised that the Council conducts registration targeting campaigns aimed at students and social housing tenants within the County Borough and the working relationships with the University and the local housing provider Trivallis.

## 2 (c) **Voting Systems**

Proposals in respect of Reform of the Voting System and fixed 5 year terms were provided by the Service Director for Members comment.

- Members discussed the positive and negatives aspects of each of the options in respect of voting system reform and agreed that First past the Post was the most simple, effective and low cost method of voting that provides consistency with Parliamentary election arrangements. Members also agreed that there should be consistency across all authorities with the voting system used, rather than a discretionary choice.
- Members agreed with the 5 year term as outlined within the Consultation document proposals.

## 2 (d) **Methods of Voting**

Modernising Voting Procedures, All Postal Voting, Electronic Voting, Remote Voting Polling and Counting , Electronic Counting, Mobile Polling and 'Polling' places, Days of Voting, ID at polling station were all considered by Members of the Working Group and were in general all agreed by Members as options to take forward.

- Members agreed that in today's society with the growth of electronic devices, electronic voting should be made available
- Remote voting should be an option
- Although not unanimous it was agreed that voting did not have to be conducted on one specific day
- Members agreed that there should be enhancement with Electronic forms.
- Members discussed the options of thumb scanning devices and ID requirements at polling stations as a positive security measure to verify a voter's identity.
- Members also discussed the need to consider those voters who may be IT illiterate and how these voters could be assisted to ensure they did not become disengaged from the process.
- In respect of polling locations, Members commented that anywhere that has provisions available that could facilitate voting stations should be further researched as options, to assist in making the process easier again for voters; however Members agreed that licensed premises should not be considered as a potential location.
- Members discussed compulsory voting and agreed that everyone should vote as it was their civic duty; even if an option was provided on the ballot paper of 'None of the Above'.
- Members discussed the Welsh Language and commented that everyone should be able to converse in their preferred language of choice.

## 2 (e) **Standing for Election**

Members provided their views in respect of public information and restrictions on candidacy, as well as Assembly Members.

- Members were in agreement to the affiliation disclosure proposal.
- Members discussed in detail the proposal in respect of Council staff standing for Election and the time period for resignation and agreed that a person would not be able to carry out dual roles (if elected) as a Council employee and Councillor for the same Authority and that the present guidelines were fit for purpose and did not need to be amended.
- Members agreed to the prohibition of Assembly Members serving as a County Borough Councillor simultaneously.

2 (f) **Returning Officer**

The Service Director provided Members with details of the consultation documents proposals in respect of the role of the Returning Officer and the current practice within the County Borough.

- Members commented that the proposals outlined within the consultation did not reflect the Authorities current position and commented that these duties should automatically be seen as part of the returning Officers duties with no additional remuneration.

The Chairman thanked Members for their comments and it was **RESOLVED** that these along with the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be presented to the Council meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> September, for the formal Council response to be formulated.

**This meeting closed at 14.45pm**

**Clr M Webber**

**Chairman**



**Mark Drakeford, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.**

Local Government Democracy Division  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

Dear Mark,

Thank you for opportunity to participate and respond to the Welsh Government consultation process considering proposed electoral reform in Wales, pertaining to both Local Government and National Assembly level elections.

In light of your invitation, Council agreed to establish two Working Groups of the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposals contained within the consultation document. After receiving feedback from the two working groups, Council has endorsed the following responses and has asked me to formally feedback our comments and observations.

**1. Participation and Enfranchisement**

The Members of both working groups were in agreement that greater participation is representative of a healthier democratic system and the majority supported the extension of the franchise to incorporate 16 and 17-year-olds at both levels of election, in recognition of the positive empirical evidence suggesting that such a measure would strengthen the democratic process in Wales. However Members were conscious of the need for education and awareness in respect of both Local and National politics as well as consideration to the best approaches available for engaging with young people in this area.

Furthermore, Members were supportive of the extension of voting rights to include all legal residents in Wales, irrespective of nationality or citizenry, and likewise the further extension that such residents should be allowed to stand for election at both levels of government.

## **1.1 Prisoner Voting**

The majority of working Group Members rejected proposals to incorporate prisoners into the franchise as it was felt that they had been removed from society due to their actions and therefore any right to vote had been forfeited.

## **2. Improving Registration**

Members of the Working Group's were unanimous in agreement that improved registration processes should be pursued, where possible and practical, and there was a strong consensus that 21<sup>st</sup> Century practices should be introduced, where it is feasible to do so, to reflect the societal changes of the digital age.

A proliferation of available mechanisms to encourage and assist voter registration is necessary to increase democratic participation and, to achieve such an end, Members were in favour of an automatic system of voter registration based on inter-departmental data sharing across Government services that would ultimately result in one shared database of registered voters in Wales.

The posited extension of a greater number of Local Authority staff able to assist in registration was also well received, although concerns were raised about the security of systems at public places such as libraries and leisure centres. It was suggested that it may be possible to arrange a system whereby empowered staff are able to register citizens, but approvals must be authorised centrally by the ERO.

In keeping with the outlined proposals, Members again supported in principle the establishment and pilot of a single, centralised register of electors, although further clarity in respect of costs and accountability was needed.

## **3. Reforming the voting system**

Members were unanimously against the proposal to move toward a method of Proportional Representation at Local Government level, feeling that the current system of First Past The Post (FPTP) offered a simple and cost effective method of voting that provided both familiarity and consistency with Parliamentary elections. The Members did not feel that there was any evidence to suggest that the current system has any negative effect on participation or turnout and felt that alterations would be both costly and unnecessary.

The majority of members were of the opinion that changing the First Past The Post arrangement would lead to an over-complication of voting procedures for residents, with such a move only dissuading more of the electorate from voting. Furthermore, the costs incurred by producing and disseminating explanatory resources for voters would undoubtedly be significant and Members of the Group felt that this would not be justifiable in such a harsh economic climate.

Members therefore, by majority were opposed to a current move toward Proportional Representation and further rejected the notion that individual principal Councils should be given discretionary powers to choose their own voting systems on the basis that it would lead to a disjointed and confusing arrangement on a pan-national basis.

Finally, Members were in favour of Welsh Government proposals to move towards fixed five year terms of office.

#### **4. Methods of Voting**

As outlined previously, the Working Groups were supportive, in principle, of taking steps toward greater voter participation and were of the opinion that low turnout is more to do with a lack of public information on the role of Local Government and less to do with the systems and structures of voting, although Members acknowledged and supported the potential benefits of the suggested reforms.

Members were particularly interested in developing the all-postal vote, remote voting and mobile voting proposals, as residents in some areas within the County had some difficulty in accessing a polling station. Both Working Group's were ultimately in favour of the introduction of all of the proposed voting methods, although they broadly agreed that they wanted to see the results of a pilot before agreeing to implement any large-scale change to the mode of voting in the County Borough.

Members showed favourable support to electronic methods of counting and the simplification of postal voting procedures in order to streamline the process and reduce costs over the longer term.

In respect of suggested voting day changes the majority of Members agreed with the suggested proposal that voting did not have to be conducted on one specific day,

with a specific reference to Sundays being a potential better option. There was further mixed opinion in respect of the benefits that would be brought through the requirement of ID at polling stations, as although Members agreed that this would assist in a further level of security there were concerns about those individuals who may not possess the ID required (i.e. passports) and potential consequences for voters without the relevant ID documentation.

## **5. Candidacy**

Members of the Working Group's saw no reason to remove the necessity of publication of a candidate's home address, but did acknowledge and appreciate the concerns surrounding this. The Group noted that the home addresses of Elected Members are provided on the Council's website and took the view that candidates were accepting of this and willing to publish such information if and when they were successful in any election.

Members were supportive of the proposal to adopt a candidate's statement for publication to promote positive engagement with voters, and that the requirement to declare Party affiliation should remain to ensure that voters are provided with a clear and transparent understanding of who they can vote for. Further agreement was reached in adopting the position that it would be inappropriate for a candidate to serve as both an Assembly Member and a Councillor.

The Working Group's did not feel that there were any major concerns in allowing Council staff below senior level to stand in elections, providing that the appropriate checks and balances were in place to prevent undue influence over Council policy. Members were of the view however, that once a Council employee had become elected they could not perform the two roles.

## **6. Returning Officers**

At present, the role of the Returning Officer in RCT is allocated to the Legal Services Director and the arrangement is considered to work well. With this in consideration, Members did not feel that the Chief Executive role should necessarily incorporate that responsibility on a statutory basis.

In respect of remuneration of salary, it should be highlighted that current practices within RCT are that the Council offers no remuneration package for the Local Government Elections.

## **7. Welsh Language Considerations**

Members were of the opinion that any substantial reform of the electoral system would not have any significant impact on the Welsh language, whether positive or negative, provided that any alterations and modernisation initiatives were made in keeping with existing arrangements and sought to reflect the current emphasis on Welsh language promotion.

A move toward electronic voting would, for example, necessitate that bilingual software options were provided with accurate translations.

## **8. Other Items for Consideration.**

As part of discussions, Members suggested that consideration is given to the renaming of Electoral Registration to either 'Citizen' or 'Residents List' and consideration to those individuals who are disenfranchised from voting are further reviewed i.e. Homeless.

In addition to all the suggested improved processes and to assist in achieving the increased turnout, education and awareness raising of both Local and National politics is imperative to ensure positive engagement with voters, in particular if the voting age is to be lowered.





Welsh Government  
Consultation Document

# Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales

Date of issue: 18 July 2017

Action required: Responses by 10 October 2017

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

<b>Overview</b>	<p>This consultation is seeking views on a range of electoral reforms. These proposed reforms deal primarily with the way in which people register to vote and cast their vote.</p>
<b>How to respond</b>	<p>The closing date for responses is <b>10 October 2017</b>.</p> <p>Responses can be submitted via the online document of consultation questions: <a href="https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/electoral-reform-local-government-wales">https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/electoral-reform-local-government-wales</a></p> <p>To respond to the consultation, please either complete the online form or request the accompanying questionnaire and return it either by email: <a href="mailto:RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk">RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk</a></p> <p>or by post to Local Government Democracy Division Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ</p>
<b>Further information and related documents</b>	<p><b>Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.</b></p> <p>The consultation document can be accessed from the Welsh Government website at: <a href="https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/electoral-reform-local-government-wales">https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/electoral-reform-local-government-wales</a></p>
<b>Contact details</b>	<p>For further information:</p> <p>Local Government Democracy Division Welsh Government, Crown Buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ</p> <p>email: <a href="mailto:RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk">RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk</a></p>
<b>Data protection</b>	<p>telephone: 03000 256913</p> <p>How the views and information you give us will be used</p> <p>Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other</p>



Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

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## Foreword

With the relevant provisions of the Wales Act on electoral and registration matters due to come into effect next year, the Welsh Government and the Assembly has a new opportunity seriously to review how democracy functions here, how people become eligible to vote, how they exercise their right to vote and how elections are organised.

In our local elections last month, with a few exceptions, for the mass of people the experience of voting was the same as that of their grandparents would have had: walking to the local polling station and filling out a ballot paper with a pencil tied on a string. I enjoy that experience, as do many others, but it can also be viewed as anachronistic and nothing like other comparable procedures people experience in their everyday lives.

Although this consultation paper deals primarily with the arrangements for registration and voting and how we might change them, the Welsh Government will, separately, be continuing its efforts to raise interest in democratic participation, with the aim of reducing the number of uncontested seats and increasing the turnout in elections.

In line with this, I want to explore ways in which we can allow more people to participate in elections by extending the franchise to young people, by making registration easier and more automatic, by making it easier to vote using different methods and making sure people are well informed about who is standing for election.

I am well aware of concerns about security and electoral fraud. These are important considerations, but ways of addressing them must be found which do not compromise the basic democratic right of citizens to participate in elections.

I hope you will respond to this consultation. This is a genuine exercise in finding out what is possible, practical and desirable before we move towards any legislative change. My hope is that the next 12 weeks will add new ideas and fresh possibilities, as well as responding to the ones set out here. In that way, by the time 16 year olds get to cast their vote in the next local elections, it will be easy for them to register, easy for them to vote and as a result, will be encouraged to do so in large numbers.

**Mark Drakeford,**  
**Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Participation in elections is essential if we are to have a healthy democratic system. This cannot be achieved solely, or even mainly, by legislative means but requires people to be inspired sufficiently to engage. Welsh Government, local government, political parties and other stakeholders, all have a role to play in addressing the low levels of turnout and the scale of uncontested seats at local elections, which we witnessed in the May elections. This paper, however, deals primarily with the way in which people register to vote and cast their vote.
- 1.2. The Wales Act 2017 received Royal Assent on 31 January this year and contains provisions (section 5 *et seq*) which have the effect of transferring competence to the National Assembly to legislate in relation to the administration of elections to the Assembly itself and of those to local government. In addition, legislative competence for the registering of electors eligible to vote in these elections and the franchise applying to them are also devolved. An exception to this is the digital registration system operated by the UK Government.
- 1.3. Up until now, the Assembly has had very limited powers in relation to local elections or registration of electors and its powers in relation to Assembly elections have been confined to the appointment of returning officers (where constituencies crossed county boundaries) and regional returning officers, as well as the financing of these elections through providing funds to returning officers and the costs of distributing candidates' literature to Royal Mail.
- 1.4. The transfer of competence by the Wales Act, once the relevant provisions are brought into force, provides the opportunity for the Welsh Government to review the framework of legislation applying to Welsh local elections.<sup>1</sup> This paper concentrates on the franchise for local elections, the registration of electors, voting procedures and systems, standing as a candidate and the returning officer function. Where appropriate, the Welsh Government intends to include provisions within forthcoming local government legislation when the opportunity arises.
- 1.5. In putting forward these proposals for consultation, we recognise that any reforms brought into effect will require detailed planning and cooperation between the electoral community of returning officers, electoral administrators and the statutory bodies. The Welsh Government has enjoyed a strong working relationship with this community (who are noted for their excellent record in the successful delivery of elections and other polls in Wales) and will seek to work closely with them and other stakeholders in progressing the reform programme.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Assembly is conducting a separate review of the size, electoral system and franchise for the Assembly and there may well be issues in this paper which could apply to both

## 2. Building the franchise

- **Votes for 16 and 17-year-olds**

- 2.1. The extension of the franchise to include all those aged 16 on polling day in Welsh local government elections would be the biggest change to the franchise since 1970, when 18- year-olds were able to vote for the first time. This younger cohort is already able to vote in Scottish local elections and elections to the Scottish Parliament and participated actively in the Scottish independence referendum.
- 2.2. It has been Welsh Government policy for several years to reduce the voting age to 16 and indeed the National Assembly by a clear majority voted in favour of this move in May 2013. Furthermore, the policy was included in the manifestos of the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats at the General Election. We should soon be in a position to implement this.
- 2.3. The case for enabling 16-year-olds to vote has been well-rehearsed. With most of the 16 and 17-year-old cohort these days being in school, it makes them far more exposed to political education of some sort than was the case in previous generations. Use of social media and electronic media sites is high amongst this age group and discussion of major political events is common.
- 2.4. Citizenship and political education are important parts of the curriculum and learners currently have the opportunity to study politics and current affairs through Personal and Social Education, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) and the new Welsh Baccaalaureate.
- 2.5. The 'Active citizenship' theme in the existing Personal and Social Education (PSE) framework, the key document which schools and colleges should use to review and develop existing PSE provision for 7 to 19-year-olds, allows learners to develop their knowledge on politics and their rights in a democratic society which reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This should mean a more politically aware section of the population.
- 2.6. The 2014 Scottish referendum – where votes at 16 were made available for the first time in the UK – gives some indication of likely rates of registration. 109,533 16 and 17 year-olds registered, estimated at 89 per cent of those eligible.
- 2.7. Turnout of 16 and 17 year-olds was estimated at 75%, compared with 54% of 18-24 year olds and 72% of 25-34 year olds, though it was lower than for the electorate as a whole (85%). This presents an argument in favour of extending the franchise, as an early experience of voting could well lead to a maintained engagement, which would hopefully lead on to a greater interest in democratic politics more generally, including standing as a candidate. The lowering of the voting age would require a drive for maximum rates of registration. This might be easier for this age group than for those a couple of years older because most of them are still at home and, as stated earlier, attending school.
- 2.8. Currently, those who are entitled to vote at Assembly elections are people who are registered and who are entitled to vote at local government elections. Extending the local government register to include 16 and 17-year-olds would, without changes to the current legislation, apply automatically to voting at

Assembly elections. It will, of course, be for the Assembly to determine, if it so wishes, to remain affixed to the local government register.

**Q1 – Do you agree that the qualifying age for voting in Welsh local government elections should be lowered to 16?**

- **EU Citizens and citizens of other countries**

- 2.9. At present, it is unclear how the decision to leave the European Union (EU) will affect the automatic right of EU citizens to vote in council and Assembly elections here.
- 2.10. This issue will form part of the negotiations. Both the UK Government and the other EU member-states have expressed a strong willingness to reach an agreement which protects in full the existing rights of EU citizens who already are resident in the UK and this is also the clear position of the Welsh Government.
- 2.11. The question of EU citizens who arrive in the UK after EU withdrawal from the EU is a slightly different one, even if this too could form part of the discussion about the future of the relationship between the EU and the UK. It could be argued that such citizens should be no differently treated to citizens of non-EU countries once the UK is no longer a member of the EU – although, of course, citizens of Commonwealth countries already have and would presumably retain a right to vote here.
- 2.12. Citizens of other countries who may be resident here (other than EU citizens or citizens of Commonwealth countries) have no entitlement to vote. So a citizen of, say, the United States, China or Russia cannot participate. If it were decided that an EU citizen who arrives in the UK after UK withdrawal from the UK should have voting rights, then depending on the level of ongoing integration between the UK and the EU, the differentiation between EU/Commonwealth and non-EU/Commonwealth citizens arguably becomes less defensible. There is a case to be made that if someone lives in Wales lawfully, the local and Assembly franchises should also include them.

**Q2 – Should EU citizens who move to Wales once the UK has left the EU continue to acquire the right to vote?**

**Q3 – Should voting rights be extended to all legal residents in Wales, irrespective of their nationality or citizenry?**

**Q4 – EU and Commonwealth citizens can stand for election to local government in Wales, Should this continue and be extended to all nationalities made eligible to vote?**

- **Prisoners - See Annex**

- 2.13. Extending the franchise to prisoners is a subject that raises a number of issues, such as where a prisoner should be deemed resident for the purposes of voting

and whether the franchise should be universally extended to the prison population or linked to specific criteria such as the length or type of sentence. Because of these complexities we are not making firm policy proposals at this stage while legal issues continue to be explored. However, we would welcome responses to the questions at the end of the annex as a test of public opinion on this subject which we would take into account when considering whether we will legislate on this subject.

### 3. Improving registration

- 3.1. In this section we are considering policies designed to help people to register more easily. Registering to vote does not suggest any compulsion to use that vote. However, being on the register is a necessary pre condition to voting. In this section we put forward proposals to help ensure so that all those eligible to vote have these choices.
- 3.2. Electoral registration is the act of including names on the register held by the local Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and denotes all those entitled to vote in that area (in Wales, there is an ERO for each of the 22 counties). It is compulsory to provide the required information to register when requested to do so, subject to a fine for failure to do so.
- 3.3. The register is therefore a list of people eligible to vote. The proposals which follow are designed to maximise the number of eligible persons included on the register. They do not imply any compulsion or obligation to cast a vote. That is an individual choice.

- **Data-sharing and Automatic Registration**

- 3.4. The introduction of individual electoral registration to replace household registration has generally been welcomed, in principle, in that it cast off a system primarily based on the “head of the household” having the power to provide personal information on the persons resident at an address, possibly without their knowledge, and replaced it with one placing the responsibility to register on each individual.
- 3.5. Unfortunately, this has led to a fall in the numbers registered, particularly amongst certain groups. The inability of landlords to register their tenants has led to big drops in the numbers of students on the electoral roll and there are also problems associated with other mobile populations. So, areas with high levels of students, migrants or people with unsettled lifestyles may suffer disproportionately from reduced levels of registration.
- 3.6. The Electoral Administration Act 2013 provided UK Ministers with the power to allow pilot schemes for improving registration. These are being pursued by the UK Cabinet Office’s Modernising Electoral Registration Programme, in which the Welsh Government participates.
- 3.7. One of the innovations that the UK Government has introduced to counter this fall in registration is the concept of data-sharing. In particular, data from the Department of Work and Pensions has been used to compare with the register, enabling EROs to make enquiries as to whether any persons absent from the register were resident at the named address. EROs can include someone on the register where other data confirms their belief that someone is resident at that address. Any data sharing would be in compliance with the Data Protection Act (due to be replaced next year by the General Data Protection Regulation<sup>2</sup>) and personal information would be treated in accordance with the principles of that Act

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.eugdpr.org/>



- 3.8. There could be considerable scope for expanding this resource by making available other official sources of data, which record persons' addresses, such as those maintained by the DVLA, HMRC and other listings maintained by local authorities.
- 3.9. This could be done by providing EROs with the freedom to make their own decisions as to what alternative sources of data might be relied upon, provided, of course that the proposed data-holder has a legal basis to disclose it.
- 3.10. There could be merit in moving far closer towards a system of automatic registration.
- 3.11. This position has been proposed by Claire Bassett, chief executive to the Electoral Commission, recently, in stating:
- "We believe that more automatic registration processes would greatly improve the system, with voters being added to the register after providing their details to other government services. A key example would be the automatic registration of young people when they are issued with a National Insurance number, helping to address historic under-registration of this age group".*
- 3.12. There will be other examples where this possibility exists and EROs could be given freedom to make use of them. This suggests a widening of the power of EROs to gather data for the register in a more flexible fashion than has been allowed for in recent regulations. The Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 includes provisions which allow EROs to exercise their discretion as to the issuing of Household Enquiry Forms and to use electronic means to send out invitations and reminders to register.
- 3.13. We could seek to move to a situation whereby, routinely, electors would only need to check they were registered rather than having to apply for registration. If individuals are added to the register without their initial knowledge, it should be remembered that registration is compulsory, and that being on the register only provides the right to vote – it does not require the right to be exercised.

**Q5 – Should Electoral Registration Officers have a greater range of sources available to them to assist citizens to be added to the register?**

**Q6 – Which data sources do you think should be used by Electoral Registration Officers?**

- **Enabling a wider range of Council Officers to assist people to register**

- 3.14. The more sources which are used to compile the register, of course, the more necessary it is for the available software to be formatted to identify and discard duplicate entries. There could be distinct advantages in allowing access to the register to a wider range of council staff, so enabling, for instance, the possibility of registering at a local library or leisure centre. When members of the public

contact their council for whatever reason, including, for instance, enquiries about council tax, there could be an automatic check against the register.

- 3.15. There would inevitably need to be a system by which the ERO or their staff were automatically informed when an amendment were made to the register by other council staff but this should not be an insurmountable problem, particularly as we move towards electronic registers. It could become a routine exercise as people make use of council services.

**Q7 – Should a wider range of local authority staff be empowered to assist citizens to obtain registration through access to the local government register and have the ability to amend it?**

**Q8 – What controls should be put in place to ensure the Electoral Registration Officer maintains overall control of the register?**

- **Relaxing rules on individual registration**

- 3.16. There may be a case for relaxing the rules on individual registration, so that a household form is permissible in certain circumstances but allowing for each individual to “sign”, either in paper format or through using some identifier provided to them. This would mean each individual would still need to indicate their participation in the process but a single form could be accepted by the ERO.
- 3.17. This could have positive advantages where a number of people reside in accommodation with a single landlord, such as a university residence or care home.

**Q9 – Should the individual registration rules be relaxed to allow for block registrations in certain circumstances, protecting the right to vote for populations otherwise at risk of exclusion?**

- **Targeted registration campaigns**

- 3.18. EROs are already able to conduct targeted registration campaigns but it may be possible to broaden these, aiming, for instance, at school students, the unemployed, council tenants, older persons in care – any category where it is possible to reach known individuals.
- 3.19. Welsh Government officials liaise closely with the UK Cabinet Office’s Modernising Electoral Registration Programme and the pilot exercises being promoted by this and we are supportive of its goals. These pilots allow EROs to be imaginative about how they conduct their annual canvass of households, in order to use their resources most effectively.
- 3.20. Targeted campaigns have also taken place in some areas aimed at working with universities, housing associations and other third parties to try and reach those least likely to register otherwise. There is a case for allowing EROs discretion as to how they conduct their canvassing exercises so as to maximise registration.

The Behavioural Insights Team (a social purpose company dedicated to the application of behavioural sciences) worked recently with two Welsh local authorities on registering students and their work could help to inform the design of literature aimed at this group.

**Q10 – Should we place a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to consider whether any individual groups within their electoral area should be specifically targeted in registration campaigns?**

- **Identifying people moving into and out of an area**

- 3.21. It should be possible for mechanisms to be introduced to identify people moving into or within an area to be provided with registration forms as a matter of course. This could be coupled with them receiving notice of their responsibility to pay council tax, for instance.
- 3.22. Social services departments or health bodies could be the first to be aware of people moving into, within, or out of an area and could provide people with registration forms and inform the ERO of the move. Universities should be aware of students changing address and similarly could have a link to the registration process. Housing associations, care homes and even estate agents could be included in this process.

**Q11 – Should we introduce arrangements so that agencies who are aware of people moving have a duty to inform the Electoral Registration Officers?**

- **Developing an all-Wales electronic register**

- 3.23. Despite the inclusion of provisions in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 for the development of a Co-ordinated On-Line Record of Electors (CORE), no such scheme has been established. Wales, with its 22 EROs, would appear to be ideal for the development of a single electronic register, which might facilitate some of the reforms proposed in this consultation and we would seek to work with the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders on its development.
- 3.24. For some of the proposals in the next section to work effectively, an electronic register would be a positive advantage. The CORE project was seen as essential in enabling multi-channel e-enabled elections and this could be our aim for Wales.
- 3.25. An all-Wales register would mean the use of common software on which to carry the register. Should electronic / remote voting be introduced it should be formatted so that the vote is recorded against the register whenever it was cast and from what location.

**Q12 – What are your views on the development of a single electronic register for Wales?**

## 4. The voting system

- **Offering a choice: First Past the Post or Single Transferable Vote**

- 4.1. The Local Government White Paper (Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed) contained the proposal to allow individual local authorities to decide on their preference to stay with the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system or to move to election through a Single Transferable Vote system. Such a move would require a fresh electoral review of the council area to enable multi-member wards. The proposal would prevent a council, having changed to a different electoral system, from moving back until at least two elections had passed.
- 4.2. FPTP has been the only electoral system used to elect local councils in Wales since the introduction of elected local government in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also the system used to elect MPs, constituency AMs and community councillors in Wales. Accordingly, it is the electoral system with which Welsh voters are most familiar. Nevertheless, voters appeared to cope adequately with the elections for regional members of the Assembly, the European Parliament and Police and Crime Commissioners which all use different methods of proportional representation.
- 4.3. Supporters of FPTP take the view that the voting and counting procedures are simple, familiar and relatively cheap and there is a straightforward relationship between where a candidate finishes in the tally of votes and whether or not they are elected.
- 4.4. The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a preferential electoral system, which means voters are asked to rank the available candidates in order of preference. Voters may choose to rank all the available candidates or only as many as they wish, which may be as few as just one.
- 4.5. STV is considered to be a system of “proportional representation”. It usually produces election results which generally reflect the proportions of votes cast for the different political parties, groups and independents in an individual electoral area and across the election as a whole.
- 4.6. Each election of a principal council is a separate election. It is appropriate that the council should decide on its electoral method just as the Assembly will be able to decide on its preferred option, albeit by a two-thirds majority. We propose that each authority should be allowed to decide for itself on the electoral system they prefer. We do not propose to introduce the option of STV for elections to community councils, because a root and branch review of the sector is underway.

**Q13 – Do you agree that individual principal councils should be able to choose their voting system?**

**Q14 – Do you agree that a constitutional change such as this should be subject to a two-thirds majority?**

- **Five year terms**

- 4.7. It is the intention of Welsh Government to introduce statutory five year terms for local government, replacing the existing arrangements for four year terms. This would be in keeping with the five year terms for the UK Parliament (as set in the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011) and for the Assembly in the Wales Act. This would mean that the next ordinary date of elections to local government would be in May 2022.

**Q15 – Do you agree that the term of local government in Wales should be set at five years?**

## 5. The voting process

[NOTE: Any reforms to voting methods proposed below could apply to elections, including by elections, to community councils as well as to those to principal councils]

- 5.1. For most people, the experience of voting has not changed significantly during their lifetimes. It is true that a higher proportion than ever now vote by post since absent voting rules were changed in the Representation of the People Act 2000 to provide it as an option on demand but it is still a minority activity.
- 5.2. The general experience is of attending the polling station allocated to your area, informing the presiding officer of your identity, receiving a ballot paper, taking it to a booth, completing it with the pencil provided and placing it in the ballot box provided.
- 5.3. This remains the case despite the fact that most people's experience of "voting" for other things would involve use of some type of computer screen, mobile or land phone or TV remote control. In many cases, such as elections or ballots within trade unions or other societies, the voting systems are designed to be secure, with individual codes of some sort to try and ensure that the correct person is voting – and doing so only once.
- 5.4. Despite the testing of various pilots at local and regional elections in the early 2000s, the traditional system remains in place. The question this raises is whether, as the electoral voting system diverges increasingly from how people otherwise live their lives, its relative monopoly will come to be seen as an anachronistic relic. Having said that, of course, there is plenty of evidence to show that when people really think voting is important, they turn up at old-fashioned polling stations in numbers. That does not mean, though, that even more would not participate if there were alternative voting methods available. This could be particularly the case in relation to young people, for whom the polling station process will be increasingly divorced from their normal experience of completing forms and providing personal details on line for almost all official communications.
- 5.5. In saying this, we have to attend to one of the main reasons why change has not been pursued. Issues around security and fraud have been associated with postal voting in particular and are feared in relation to any form of remote voting. In introducing any of the proposed reforms to the method of voting below, ROs would need to be vigilant and continue the scrutiny of the process as they do now to spot any irregularities. We do not wish to be resistant to reform, however, due to concerns over scrutiny when there have been no significant cases of electoral fraud in Wales in recent times.
- 5.6. There is now the opportunity to consider reforms to voting methods which could be piloted at council by-elections, or at the ordinary council elections in 2022, or even introduced across Wales in 2022. We would retain existing provisions in UK legislation requiring the Electoral Commission to evaluate any electoral pilot and we would seek to work with the Electoral Commission – and other stakeholders - on the development of any new methodology.

**Q16 – Do you agree in principle with the desirability of reforming the voting system to encourage greater participation?**

**Q17 – Are there other initiatives not covered which might be taken to enable greater participation in elections in Wales?**

- **All-postal voting**

- 5.7. This would involve all electors in the relevant area receiving a ballot paper by post at the normal time for issuing postal votes. It would not appear conceivable that this could operate successfully without removing the need for the personal identifiers required to support a postal vote application as requiring the application process would both be administratively problematic and also inevitably lead to a declining number of electors. The personal statement element, confirming that the vote was cast by the intended person, should remain, however, as providing at least a self-administered honesty check.
- 5.8. Of course, it would not be practicable to operate this system if the local elections were held at the same time as another poll for which normal rules applied to postal voting. Requiring personal identifiers for one form of postal vote but not another – particularly if there were multiple voters in one household – would make the process difficult to follow and open to criticism.
- 5.9. Previous pilots in the early 2000s indicated that all-postal voting led to an increased turnout (although in Wales the pilot was only at a single community council by-election). This has a logic to it. If you receive a ballot paper with instructions and a pre-paid reply envelope, there is a stronger chance that you will respond than being required to attend a polling station on a set day between certain hours. The expense of conducting an exercise by post, including use of pre-paid reply envelopes, would need to be balanced against the savings made by the removal of the need to operate polling stations.
- 5.10. In May 2003, 35 local authorities in England piloted all-postal voting. The outcome of those pilots was a recommendation from the Electoral Commission that all-postal voting should be adopted as the normal method of voting at local elections in the UK. This reflected the positive impact on voter turnout at these elections (in some places, turnout doubled) and the fact that there was no evidence at that time of an increase in fraud.
- 5.11. The local elections scheduled for May 2004 were postponed to June and combined with the European Parliament elections. The UK government used this opportunity to trial all-postal voting in these elections across four regions and the pilots did show a significant increase in turnout in those areas.
- 5.12. The Electoral Commission report into these elections drew back from their earlier recommendation because its research showed that a large minority of people wished to retain the option of voting at polling stations. Thus, the Commission recommended that a new model of multiple voting methods should be developed, including postal voting, rather than proceeding with elections run entirely by all-postal voting.

- 5.13. We recognise also the Electoral Commission's concerns about potential abuses of postal voting and would support their calls for it to be made an offence for anyone other than the voter concerned to interfere in the postal voting process.

**Q18 – Should councils be able to choose to use all-postal voting at council elections?**

**Q19 – Should it be subject to pilot exercises first?**

**Q20 – Should councils be able to operate all-postal voting in an individual ward or a number of wards within a council area?**

- **Electronic voting**

- 5.14. This implies the installation of equipment at polling stations (and possibly other locations) to enable touch-screen voting. Polling would still be subject to a form of limited supervision. It would be important to ensure that officers presiding at the polling places could not see how people were voting but they would also need to ensure that voters did not receive unauthorised assistance or guidance as to how to cast their vote.
- 5.15. Electronic voting is already used widely internationally, particularly in India but also in Belgium and Estonia amongst others.
- 5.16. Technology could probably provide that the touch-screen capacity could be made available in places other than normal polling stations but there would still need to be trained staff present to oversee and help. Also, there would need to be a way that the register was marked to indicate who had voted.
- 5.17. There are clear cost implications for this. Whether or not dedicated hardware would be required, the returning officer would need to be certain that they had sufficient working equipment available on polling day.
- 5.18. There are potentially considerable cost savings on the counting of votes, the hiring of counting premises and time. After close of voting, there would need to be a set location where the results of poll were displayed, showing the number of votes cast and how they were shared between the different candidates.
- 5.19. There would need to be measures to prevent voting patterns being viewed ahead of counting time to prevent this information assisting candidates or their campaigners. Similarly, there would need to be secure procedures in place to ensure the security of data being transmitted from the polling places to the central count operations. The challenging of votes could become less likely. Systems might be configured so that an error in completion of the ballot form could lead to the vote being rejected and voters being allowed another attempt.

**Q21 – Should electronic voting be enabled at local elections?**



- **Remote voting**

- 5.20. This refers to a process of voting through access of the internet by an electronic device, using an individual recognition code. The use of codes of different sorts to ensure that only the intended person is accessing a system is now commonly used for purchasing, banking, voting in elections within political parties, trade unions and other organisations. Registration to vote is now routinely performed on line, as is registering/taxing a motor vehicle and accessing a multitude of other public services or transactions.
- 5.21. Remote voting was piloted in local elections at South Buckinghamshire in May 2007. Although only a minority made use of the facility, 10 years later the option is likely to be more popular. There were no particular technical difficulties but the Electoral Commission called for the pilots to be suspended – along with all others – until the system was generally more secure. There is a risk that, with registering being done remotely, fictitious voters could be created and that voting might not take place in secure environments. In addition, realistic concerns exist about cyber security, and any system needs to be as secure as possible from the dangers of hacking and manipulating votes. This must be weighed against this method becoming more and more commonplace in relation to other types of voting or completion of official forms and having likely efficiency savings. There are remote voting procedures operating in at least one European country allowing the casting of a vote more than once by the same person, with only the final vote cast before close of poll counting. This is to provide for the possibility that an elector may be subject to intimidation when voting but would take a later opportunity to vote in private.
- 5.22. There would need to be a window during which time voting could take place; counting would need to be performed at a set time and be open to scrutiny and arrangements might be needed for people who found it difficult or did not wish to cast their votes this way .
- 5.23. Both electronic and remote voting could include methodologies which make mistakes less likely and increase the possibility of dealing with multiple polls on the same day by assisting voters through the process.

## **Q22 – Should remote voting be enabled at local elections?**

- **Electronic counting**

- 5.24. Electronic counting is not necessarily linked to electronic voting and is now, for instance, the accepted method of counting votes cast in Scottish local elections. Its use is particularly justified by the decision of the Scottish Parliament to elect councils by the single transferable vote system, which throws up a more complex counting process than in traditional first-past-the-post elections (see above).
- 5.25. It is not always the case, however, that use of the STV electoral process is linked to electronic counting. STV votes are counted manually in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It absorbs more time and resource but is believed to have

a greater degree of transparency.

- 5.26. Electronic counting is an expensive option. The Scottish Government has reportedly paid £6.5million for the contract for the counting machines to be used this year. It would be much less, of course, for an individual Welsh authority but could still be a six-figure sum. It is, however, an area in which we could anticipate greater adaptability of equipment in the future. Authorities might prefer to purchase equipment and training for their staff rather than enter all-embracing arrangements with contractors.
- 5.27. Of course, electronic counting could also be an option on FPTP elections. It should still speed the process and have some consequential savings in time and counting staff.
- 5.28. Observing electronic counting is a less complex, and possibility less exciting prospect than traditional paper counts. The machines are quick and count less visibly, not putting votes into piles but recording the totals. They also are able to identify wrongly completed ballot papers and display them for judgement by the RO.
- 5.29. In some pilots and in the Scottish elections of 2007, there were some technical problems with the counting machines which delayed results. These appear to be largely overcome and more recent elections have taken place smoothly.

### **Q23 – Should electronic counting be introduced for local elections in Wales?**

- **Mobile polling stations**

- 5.30. This conceives some polling stations operating like mobile libraries, visiting different parts of an area, in addition to “normal” polling stations. This might be particularly useful in hard-to-reach areas, neighbourhoods with traditionally low turnouts and concentrations of elderly persons.
- 5.31. People would need to know in advance at what times the mobile station would be calling – preferably when polling cards are distributed - and there might need to be some form of broadcast message on site.
- 5.32. For this to be able to operate successfully, an electronic register system would need to be in place, ensuring that voters casting their vote in the mobile station were not able to vote again at a “normal” polling station – or vice versa. If operating an auto-update register, there would need to be a high degree of surety that reliable connections operated between the mobile polling station and the central register so that linked polling stations would see which votes had been cast. Otherwise, you would need to employ a system whereby people would have to register in advance to have a mobile vote.
- 5.33. If the same mobile polling station served more than one ward, a process would need to be in place to ensure the ballot papers from one were separated from those in another. This would be easier if electronic voting were introduced.

5.34. There would also need to be restrictions on campaigning close to a mobile station akin to those relating to other polling stations. The mobile stations themselves, of course, would need to be accessible to disabled people.

5.35. Mobile polling stations are allowed in Canada but have not been piloted in the UK.

#### **Q24 – Should mobile polling stations be enabled at local elections?**

- **Voting at places other than polling places**

5.36. This proposal would suggest enabling voting at places like supermarkets, local libraries, leisure centres and bus and railway stations – public places local people might visit during the course of a normal day.

5.37. If these were to be in addition to “normal” polling stations, so not confined to a particular polling district, again an electronic register would be required so that an elector, once having voted, had their name marked against the register to avoid the possibility of multiple voting.

5.38. Voting at places other than normal polling stations was piloted in the early 2000s. Although it appears not to have been problematic, most people preferred to stick with their local polling stations. Any places designated as additional to normal polling stations would need to be accessible to all and able to cater for voting in secret.

#### **Q25 – Should we enable returning officers to make use of polling places in addition to fixed polling stations?**

- **Voting on different days and on more than one day**

5.39. Election Day in the UK is traditionally a Thursday, possibly because of a combination of historic factors. Under the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, all General Elections should take place on the first Thursday in May every five years, barring special circumstances (as we have just witnessed).

5.40. Most other European countries hold elections on a Sunday. In the past, objections to Sunday voting have been raised from religious quarters. These days, however, many activities take place on a Sunday – like shopping and sport – which were once not permitted or commonplace.

5.41. Local authorities are not bound to hold by elections on Thursdays and occasionally choose not to. Community polls, for instance, can be held on different days. Pilots in the early 2000s included voting on days in addition to Thursday and, if we move to a situation by which the register can be marked electronically to record the casting of votes, there should be a greater possibility of stretching an electoral process over a number of days. Voting on more than one day could help to overcome circumstances such as occurred in parts of London at the time of the European referendum, where flooding led to serious disruption of transport links on polling day.

- 5.42. Any requirement to staff polling days over several days, of course, would come with the commensurate costs.
- 5.43. Counting would, of course, need to be completed at one time after all votes were cast and there would be a need to keep ballot boxes secure for a longer period of time.

**Q26 – Should we enable local elections to be held on more than one day and on days other than a Thursday?**

- **Simpler postal voting procedures**

- 5.44. Anyone can apply for a postal vote, either for a single election on a specific date, for a specific period or permanently. You will need to provide your name, address, signature and date of birth when completing the application form.
- 5.45. When voting by post, you are required to mark your vote on your ballot paper in secret, fill in a postal voting statement (which confirms that you are the person entitled to cast the vote), put the ballot and statement in the envelope provided and seal it yourself, and then post it.
- 5.46. There may be more than one election on the same day, most commonly in the case of county and community elections, but it is usually the case that both ballot papers can be inserted in the same reply envelope.
- 5.47. Many users of postal voting are elderly or otherwise infirm. For many people in these circumstances, official forms can be irksome and they may need help to deal with them, which partly defeats the object. But it is also the case that individuals without any particular vulnerabilities who have chosen to vote by post find the instructions difficult to follow and, in some cases, the sealing process less than straightforward.
- 5.48. There may well be a case for examining whether the postal vote material can be made simpler to understand and complete. There are certainly organisations who would volunteer their services to address this.

**Q27 – Should consideration be given to simplifying postal voting procedures and literature?**

**Q28 - How do you think the process could be simplified?**

- **Presenting ID at a polling station**

- 5.49. In August 2016, the UK Government published a review of electoral fraud carried out by Sir Eric Pickles (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-the-ballot-review-into-electoral-fraud>). Although it contains many proposals, the most publicised has been the proposal that voters should be required to present some form of personal identity document when attending a polling station before they could receive their ballot paper. Acceptable ID might be a passport, driving licence or utility bill. This is not that unusual. In some cases, such documents

need to be produced before being allowed entry to a council recycling centre to prove your local residence.

5.50. However, the introduction of such a requirement is not one which would lead to a higher turnout. It is more likely to result in people being turned away who then don't bother to return. As such, it puts the interest of security of the vote above that of accessibility.

5.51. Wales has, fortunately, been relatively free of any allegations of significant electoral fraud in recent years, in contrast to certain inner city areas in England. The case, therefore, for the introduction of ID at Welsh polling stations is therefore harder to justify.

**Q29 – Should electors attending a polling station be required to produce ID before they are allowed to vote? If so, what types of identification should be accepted?**

**Q30 – Do the advantages of requiring ID outweigh the risk of deterring voters?**

## 6. Standing for election

- **Removing need to publish candidate's postal address**

- 6.1. We need to be mindful of recent, though thankfully rare, occasions where politicians' accessibility has been abused, resulting in them being attacked, in one case fatally. It may be that there is no longer a necessity for the returning officer to publish the candidate's home address on election literature. The RO would, of course, need to be satisfied that the candidate at a local election was qualified to stand but if there remains a need to publish contact details, possibly an e-mail or social media address could replace their physical location. There is no intention in this proposal to prevent a candidate from showing their connection to a locality.

### **Q31 – Do you agree that it should no longer be necessary to publish a candidate's home address in election literature, including anything published electronically?**

- **On-line publication of candidate's statement**

- 6.2. On the other hand, there could be more information available to the public about the candidates' beliefs or policies, using on-line facilities. Each candidate could be required to provide a statement which would be published collectively by the returning officer and could be located in one spot on the web.
- 6.3. What we are proposing is a facility provided by an RO but in which the responsibility for the content remains with the candidate. It is the candidates' responsibility to ensure that their statement complies with the law. ROs may refuse to publish a statement if they consider it may be in breach of legislation. This practice is already employed in New Zealand and the Netherlands.

### **Q32 – Do you agree that each candidate should be required to provide a personal statement for inclusion on a website provided by the authority to whom they are seeking election?**

- **Prohibition of Assembly member standing as council candidate**

- 6.4. The National Assembly's Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, in a 2014 report (<http://senedd.assembly.wales/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=14799>), called for the Welsh Government to review whether it was appropriate for an Assembly Member to also serve as a county councillor. The Welsh Government's view is that this is not appropriate, given the full-time role an Assembly Member fulfils. However, it is possible that this issue will be addressed through disqualification from the Assembly, rather than through amending local government legislation. Otherwise, the disqualification rules for election to local authorities could be amended. In either case, we are proposing that a councillor should be free to stand for election to the Assembly, and that Assembly Members be able to stand for election to a council, but that, if elected, they would need to vacate the first held position within a year.

### **Q33 – Do you agree that it should not be permissible to serve both as an Assembly Member and councillor?**

- **Requirement to declare party affiliation**

- 6.5. Welsh Government policy is also that it should not be acceptable for a person to stand for election without declaring their membership of a political party, if that is in fact the case. Consideration could be given to making that illegal at council elections, with the result declared invalid if it were proven that a candidate withheld this information. Making this an offence suggests the possibility of disqualification for a period of time.
- 6.6. Party affiliation needs to be declared on a candidate's online statement (see above) if the candidate has been a member of any political party during the twelve months up to and including the election.

**Q34 – Do you agree that candidates should be required to disclose a party affiliation if they have one?**

**Q35 – What sort of evidence should be required to suggest there is an undisclosed party affiliation?**

- **Allowing council staff to stand for their own council**

- 6.7. This matter was raised previously in the consultation paper "Power to Local People"<sup>3</sup> and at that time the weight of opinion was against this idea but we wish to test it again in the context of limited progress on diversity illustrated at the 2017 local elections.
- 6.8. Officers and staff in Local Authorities generally have a thorough understanding of their communities and a deep commitment to improving their well-being. Many might themselves make effective elected members, but there are restrictions on some senior employees of a Local Authority standing for elections. In particular, although all Local Authority employees (including school staff) can stand for election unless they hold a politically restricted post (generally higher paid officers), none of them can stand for election to their own employing Authority. This makes sense from the point of view of them not being able to make decisions affecting their own employment conditions.
- 6.9. The Welsh Government recognises the need for checks and balances to ensure the integrity and impartiality of advice offered by officers to elected members. However, given that Local Authorities are major employers in all areas of Wales, these restrictions may be preventing a wide range of suitable candidates from diverse backgrounds from coming forward to stand for election in their local area.
- 6.10. Whilst any person who is disqualified currently from standing may resign their post to stand for election, this is a significant disincentive due to the risk it carries for the individual. There may be a case for this disqualification being reviewed. It results in thousands of individuals being unable to stand for election in their own area. Views are being sought as to whether any Local Authority officers should be entitled to stand for election to their own Authority. In Scotland they are only

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<sup>3</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/consultation/150203-power-to-local-people-full-en.pdf>

required to resign their paid employment with the Authority once they are elected. Alternatively, there could be a period of secondment to the council, entitling the individual to return to their employed position after completing a council term, should their employing authority so decide. An alternative approach is that the code of conduct regime could ensure that an interest is declared on any matter in which the member has a pecuniary or other interest. This would widen the pool of potential candidates while ensuring there is no conflict of interest once the candidate is elected

- 6.11. In terms of politically restricted posts – those post-holders in local authorities who cannot participate in political matters – this is in keeping with the traditional view that those officers who advise a local authority from a senior position should be politically neutral. Current arrangements require that, in addition to chief officers, each council should keep a list of officers other than these who advise or act on behalf of the council on a regular basis. Anyone on this list has to apply to an Independent Adjudicator appointed by Welsh Ministers before they can be freed to participate. Any applications for permission are extremely rare. There have been none since the 2010s. Views are being sought as to whether the need for such a list – and therefore the adjudicator position – is still justified.

**Q36 – Should any council staff below senior level be able to stand for election to their own authority?**

**Q37 – Is there still justification for councils to keep a list of those other than senior officers who should be politically restricted?**



## 7. Returning officers

- **Ending right to personal fee for returning officer**

- 7.1. Existing legislation enables ROs to reclaim an amount for their services and expenses incurred in the running of an election from the body responsible for the funding of the elections. For Welsh elections, this means the Welsh Government for Assembly elections and individual local authorities for county and community elections.
- 7.2. ROs have an independent position, governed by statute. ROs, when performing their functions, are treated as distinct from what might be their everyday job, and have the responsibility to ensure the proper administration of the election from start to finish. This implies a greater element of risk than might apply in their normal employment, although there are indemnities and insurances normally in place partly to balance this.
- 7.3. For Welsh elections, the RO must be an ERO of a principal council. Each council must appoint one of its officers as the ERO and this is usually, though not always, its chief executive. The chief executive is therefore usually also the RO.
- 7.4. An option under consideration is that the function of ERO/RO becomes an automatic function of the proposed statutory chief executive (included within the Draft Local Government Bill of 2016).
- 7.5. Within the expenses that an RO can claim from the funding body has traditionally been an element representing a personal fee. This recognises that the role is additional to – or separate from – their normal job. In recent years, however, there has been significant public attention brought to the level of salaries payable to senior public servants at a time of general restraint and limitations over pay more generally and of lower level public servants in particular. This has included the issue of RO fees, which, in some cases, are claimed in multiples. (This is the case in Assembly elections, for instance, if an RO covers more than one constituency and/or is appointed as Regional RO for the purpose of the election of Regional Assembly Members).
- 7.6. We are considering legislating to prevent ROs recovering a personal fee from their own authority and to replicate this policy in relation to the fees and charges payable at Assembly elections.
- 7.7. Local authorities will be able, if they wish, to consider whether to recognise the compulsory RO role within the salary of the chief executive. In doing so, they will need to take into account that the RO responsibility embraces the management of Assembly and town and community council elections as well as those to their own authority. Should they wish to increase the salary for this purpose, they would need to consult the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales for a view.

**Q38 – Do you agree that the statutory chief executive role should include that of returning officer?**

**Q39 – Do you agree that any addition to salary in recognition of returning officer duties should be a matter for the local authority to determine?**

- **Simplifying fees and charges system**

- 7.8. The existing system of paying for elections to the Assembly involves the Assembly approving a fees and charges order which details the maximum amounts claimable by an RO for services and expenses at an election.
- 7.9. ROs are able to claim an advance on the expenses and there is then a complex process by which accounts are submitted and checked with calculations taking place as to whether the RO is entitled to an addition to the advance fee or is required to return any of the fee received.
- 7.10. It can take up to a year after the election for accounts to be finalised and the resource and time required to do this, at both local authority and Welsh Government level is significant. It has the advantage of accuracy. However, it would probably represent an overall saving on public funds to move to a system whereby election costs were paid on a formula basis – linked to the size of the electorates – within which ROs would need to accommodate their expenditure on the election.
- 7.11. In this situation, there would need to be arrangements in place to deal with the recovery of any surplus and the process would have to be open to audit.

**Q40 – Should Welsh Government move to a system of calculating Assembly election costs on an agreed formula, based on the size of electorate?**

## 8. Conclusion

- 8.1. Any changes which we decide to pursue will be subject to consultation with our stakeholders through the establishment of an Electoral Reform Programme Board. We will also be participating in the Wales Elections Coordination Board, established by the Electoral Commission.
- 8.2. We are aware that these proposals are not the only proposals for change which may emerge in the coming period. The UK Government's Modernising Electoral Registration Programme is ongoing and the UK Cabinet Office has recently consulted on changes to anonymous registration. The Assembly's Presiding Officer (Y Llywydd) has established an expert panel to consider, amongst other things, reform to the way the assembly is elected.
- 8.3. On top of this, the Law Commissions of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have reviewed electoral law and report on recommended reforms. They aimed to consolidate electoral law, at the same time modernising and simplifying. We understand that their proposals are unlikely to lead to the publication of a Government Bill but may be pursued – to an extent – through secondary legislation.
- 8.4. This consultation document introduces a panoply of potential reforms to the electoral process in Wales. This is a real opportunity for a modernisation of procedures which have changed little for many, many years. We need to encourage a far greater degree of participation in political life and easing the processes leading to casting a vote could play a major role in this.
- 8.5. While we have set out many proposals within this paper it is certainly not intended that these are exhaustive. We would welcome any alternative suggestions for reform of electoral administration and democratic processes where these promote registration and participation.
- 8.6. Responses are welcomed. If you responded to the electoral section of the previous White Paper, you can refer to your previous submission without needing to duplicate it.

**Please send response to [RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk) by 10 October 2017.**

## Annex – Prisoner Voting

1. The UK Government has, despite earlier indications that it was under consideration, failed to address the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights that a blanket ban against prisoner voting contravenes Article 3 of Protocol No 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The First Minister of Scotland has, however, indicated that there will be a need for Scottish Ministers to consider their position on prisoner voting in the light of the 2016 Scotland Act.
2. The UK Government has indicated that it does not intend to bring forward legislation to respond to the European Court of Human Rights' judgment. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, which is responsible for enforcing judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, has twice called upon the UK to respond to the Court's judgment.

3. In 2010, Mark Harper, then UK Minister for Constitutional Reform, issued a statement saying:

“The Government will therefore bring forward legislation providing that the blanket ban in the existing law will be replaced. Offenders sentenced to a custodial sentence of four years or more will lose the right to vote in all circumstances, which reflects the Government's clear view that more serious offenders should not retain the right to vote. Offenders sentenced to a custodial sentence of less than four years will retain the right to vote, but legislation will provide that the sentencing judge will be able to remove that right if they consider that appropriate. Four years has in the past been regarded as the distinction between short and long-term prisoners, and the Government consider that permitting prisoners sentenced to less than four years' imprisonment to vote is sufficient to comply with the judgment.”

4. The four-year qualification proposed in 2010 would mean that in the region of 45% of prisoners would become entitled to vote and clearly those convicted of the most serious offences, would, in the main, have been given longer sentences.
5. However, the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee which considered the draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Draft Bill in 2013 recommended:
  - That all prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or less should be entitled to vote in all UK parliamentary, local and European elections;
  - That such prisoners should be registered to vote in the constituency where they were registered prior to sentencing; and that, where there is no identified prior residence, they should be able to register by means of a declaration of local connection;
  - That prisoners should be entitled to apply, 6 months before their scheduled release date, to be registered to vote in the constituency into which they are due to be released.
6. Neither of these proposals have come into effect and the Conservative government elected in 2015 made it clear that they would not be taking the matter forward. It seems unlikely in the short term that there will be any change to the current franchise in relation to prisoners, meaning that only remand prisoners are entitled to vote. (Discussions are however still underway between the UK Government and the Council of Europe.)

7. It would be possible for voting rights to be extended to the approximately 3200<sup>4</sup> prisoners resident in Wales. The issue of where they would be resident for the purposes of registration would be important here. Prisoners could be deemed resident at their addresses outside prison, or they could declare a local connection to an addresses to which they had attachments, such as their parents or family addresses. The alternative approach is that of the prison address being the relevant residence, although this could cause a sudden growth, possibly unwelcome, to the nature of the electorate of the local ward. It is noted that many inmates of Welsh prisons will have their previous or attached addresses in England, where the franchise may not have been extended.
8. In a consultation of 2009, the then UK Ministry of Justice, raised the possibility of registering prisoners to vote by using a special convicted prisoners' voting registration form attested by a designated prison official. This would enable convicted prisoners to register to vote through the 'rolling registration' route, by reference to a previous residence or enabling prisoners to make a 'declaration of local connection' where there is no connection to a previous residence. The consultation also asked whether it would be preferable for prisoners to vote by post and how prisoners' details should appear on the electoral register.
9. An alternative approach for Wales could be that eligible convicted prisoners should maintain their entry on the register at the time of their conviction. The returning officer (RO) would need to arrange for them to receive a postal vote at the institution where they were resident, or a proxy vote cast on their behalf. They would remain on that register until they were released.
10. There could still be a process of registration for unregistered persons as described in the options above. Any extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds would need to be addressed and there would need to be a process for registering young people below voting age who reach the qualifying voting age during their period of detention.
11. Prisoner voting is routinely permitted in Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, as it is in Finland and Sweden (which also allows political parties to hold campaign meetings in prison).

**Q41 – Should Welsh prisoners be allowed to register to vote and participate in Welsh local government elections? If so, should it be limited to those sentenced to less than twelve months, four years, or any sentence length?**

**Q42 – By what method should prisoners cast a vote?**

**Q43 – At what address should prisoners be registered to vote?**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-figures-2017>

## **Consultation Response Form**

Your name:

Organisation (if applicable):

email / telephone number:

Your address:

Q1 – Do you agree that the qualifying age for voting in Welsh local government elections should be lowered to 16?

Q2 – Should EU citizens who move to Wales once the UK has left the EU continue to acquire the right to vote?

Q3 – Should voting rights be extended to all legal residents in Wales, irrespective of their nationality or citizenry?

Q4 – EU and Commonwealth citizens can stand for election to local government in Wales, Should this continue and be extended to all nationalities made eligible to vote?

Q5 – Should Electoral Registration Officers have a greater range of sources available to them to assist citizens to be added to the register?

Q6 – Which data sources do you think should be used by Electoral Registration Officers?

Q7 – Should a wider range of local authority staff be empowered to assist citizens to obtain registration through access to the local government register and have the ability to amend it?

Q8 – What controls should be put in place to ensure the Electoral Registration Officer maintains overall control of the register?

Q9 – Should the individual registration rules be relaxed to allow for block registrations in certain circumstances, protecting the right to vote for populations otherwise at risk of exclusion?

Q10 – Should we place a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to consider whether any individual groups within their electoral area should be specifically targeted in registration campaigns?

Q11 – Should we introduce arrangements so that agencies who are aware of people moving have a duty to inform the Electoral Registration Officers?

Q12 – What are your views on the development of a single electronic register for Wales?

Q13 – Do you agree that individual principal councils should be able to choose their voting system?

Q14 – Do you agree that a constitutional change such as this should be subject to a two-thirds majority?

Q15 – Do you agree that the term of local government in Wales should be set at five years?

Q16 – Do you agree in principle with the desirability of reforming the voting system to encourage greater participation?

Q17 – Are there other initiatives not covered which might be taken to enable greater participation in elections in Wales?

Q18 – Should councils be able to choose to use all-postal voting at council elections?

Q19 – Should it be subject to pilot exercises first?

Q20 – Should councils be able to operate all-postal voting in an individual ward or a number of wards within a council area?

Q21 – Should electronic voting be enabled at local elections?

Q22 – Should remote voting be enabled at local elections?

Q23 – Should electronic counting be introduced for local elections in Wales?

Q24 – Should mobile polling stations be enabled at local elections?

Q25 – Should we enable returning officers to make use of polling places in addition to fixed polling stations?

Q26 – Should we enable local elections to be held on more than one day and on days other than a Thursday?

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Q28 - How do you think the process could be simplified?

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Q40 – Do you agree that any addition to salary in recognition of returning officer duties should be a matter for the local authority to determine?

Q41 – Should Welsh Government move to a system of calculating Assembly election costs on an agreed formula, based on the size of electorate?

Q42 – Should Welsh prisoners be allowed to register to vote and participate in Welsh local government elections? If so, should it be limited to those sentenced to less than twelve months, four years, or any sentence length?

Q44 – By what method should prisoners cast a vote?

Q45 – At what address should prisoners be registered to vote?

Q44- We would like to know your views on the effects that electoral reform would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Q45 - Please also explain how you believe the proposed options could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Q46 - We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Please enter here:

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: