

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, 30th 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

5. 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.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – to note that there were no declarations made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

7. 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 19th 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 20th September, 2017 in readiness for the Council's response to be made by the 10th 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 they link into the central office and that the technology has been tried and tested.
- 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 consideration to voting on a Sunday, as is the case with other European countries .
- 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.

These minutes are subject to approval at the next appropriate meeting of the Committee

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