

Consultation response form
Consultation on Electoral Reform

Please return this form to reach the Welsh Government no later than 10 October 2017

If you have any questions, please email:

RLGProgramme@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Consultation on Electoral Reform	
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Consultation questions

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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?

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments:

Access to DVLA and HMRC records would be helpful, subject to suitable data protection controls. However additional funding would be necessary to secure the necessary access to and amendments to computer systems and to fund staff training.

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?

Comments: Other local authority staff already provide the Individual electoral registration form to citizens, however at the moment only the Electoral Registration staff carry out the DWP checks and make amendments to the register. It is probably only feasible for staff who regularly use the system to be familiar enough to carry out the checks and amend the register.

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

Comments: Only electoral registration staff should be able to change 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?

Comments: Yes. Pre 2014 students were added to the Register of Electors via the Universities. A database including all students, their nationality, dates of birth and address would be sent to Electoral Services and downloaded into the Software system to enable students to vote. This was much more efficient. The same system should be in place for care homes, nursing homes, blocks of flats.

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?

Comments:

It is already best practise to do this, however activity undertaken can be limited by available resources, so if this duty is put in place additional funding should be available.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: This would be a positive step towards shared services for electoral services, subject to data protection and IT security controls.

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

Comments: No. This would enable a political party to choose a system which favours them. There would be the potential for voter confusion if different areas had different voting systems and it would make the provision of shared electoral services and efficiency savings harder to achieve.

A small number of Cardiff councillors have expressed support for a single transferable vote system of voting, however that is not the view of the majority.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Enabling electronic voting should be a priority.

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

Comments: No, It would be preferable to move to electronic voting.

Q19 – Should it be subject to pilot exercises first?

Comments: No.

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

Comments:

No there should be consistency across all wards in a Council area.

Q21 – Should electronic voting be enabled at local elections?

Comments: Yes, subject to pilots schemes taking place first to ensure that best practise is identified and followed.

Q22 – Should remote voting be enabled at local elections?

Comments: Yes, provided the secrecy of the ballot can be maintained. This should be tested in pilot schemes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: No, the issues around timing and siting would be problematic and could lead to election challenges.

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

Comments: Electronic voting should be implemented first, to ensure there are no problems arising from the use of duplicate electoral registers.

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

Comments: Currently many local authority staff are released from their usual duties for a day to carry out election work. To release them for more than one day would be problematic for front line service delivery. There is no justifiable reason for only holding elections on a Thursday and the use of different days may increase turnout, however if elections are to be held on different days funding should be provided for public awareness campaigns to ensure there is no adverse impact on voter turnout.

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

Comments: The process of signing up for a postal vote should be simplified.

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

Comments: No fixed view.

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?

Comments: No. This would be another thing putting people off voting. If this was put in place, clear guidance would need to be given on how to deal with anyone whose ID was not clearly acceptable.

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

Comments: No.

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?

Comments: Yes.

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?

Comments: No. Currently local authorities are not allowed to publish any information designed to promote a particular political party. This legislation would need to be changed.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: Party membership.

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

Comments: There is no objection to them standing for election to their own authority, provided they are required to resign if elected. This is because it would not be ethical or good governance to have staff of the authority serving as elected members of the authority. It would encourage elected members to engage in operational issues rather than governance, and could lead to the perception or the reality that some functions or teams were advantaged or disadvantaged by the presence of a cllr, for example through the budget process. It could also make other staff feel uncomfortable if their “employer” sits and works alongside them.

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

Comments: Yes.

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

Comments: No. It is important that the Returning Officer role is appointed by the Council and is held by a senior officer who is accountable and who has the relevant skills and experience of elections. That will not always be a Chief Executive, though it often will be.

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?

Comments: The Welsh Government should decide on this, not individual authorities, as there should be consistency.

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

Comments: Yes, provided the formula reflects the actual costs of elections in different types of authorities. Consultation on the formula must take place to ensure it is fair for all authorities.

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?

Comments: Yes, those sentenced to less than 12 months.

Q42 – By what method should prisoners cast a vote?

Comments: Postal vote for the area of last home address.

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

Comments: Last home address.

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 favorably than English.

It is essential that any reform considers the need to make every part of the voting process available in Welsh or bilingually, including the way in which people register to vote and cast their vote.

Bilingual information (rather than separate Welsh/English information) should be used and presented wherever possible, to ensure that the Welsh language is as visible as possible e.g. during any targeted registration campaigns (p.12)

Where appropriate, language preference (Welsh/English/Bilingual) should be recorded on all registration systems/methods and shared appropriately with any relevant organisations. For example, if there were to be a national registration system, then local authorities should be made aware of individual language preferences.

Any system must not treat the Welsh language or those wishing to utilize the services in Welsh, less favorably at any point (registration, confirmation, voting). The Welsh vernacular used on forms, systems and ballot papers should be as accessible and as easy to understand as possible. It is essential that accessible use of Welsh should be taken into consideration to encourage the use of services in Welsh, especially with younger adults voting for the first time.

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

The proposed electoral reform has the potential to increase opportunities for Welsh speakers and learners to use Welsh in some parts of Wales, which is currently inconsistent due to differing electoral IT systems etc.

Positive effects could be increased by ensuring all aspects of the process are completely bilingual or have dual functionality, whether postal voting, electronic voting or remote voting. This also applies to locations, all signage and voting materials need to be bilingual, but also a complement of bilingual staff at relevant centres in order to ensure that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language.

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 favorably 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 favorably than the English language.

Comments:

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:

Comments:

Cardiff has many voters whose first language is neither English or Welsh. It would help to increase electoral registration and election turnout if funding were available to conduct voting campaigns in languages reflecting the demographic of the city or if national voting campaigns were conducted in other languages.

It is important:

1. That any legislative reforms are fully funded by the Welsh government.
2. That the electoral community is fully engaged in developing and implementing any new processes.
3. To ensure there is adequate lead in time to prepare the new processes, for elections, any legislative changes should not apply to elections held within the initial 6 months period, and there should be a minimum of 12 months before any electoral registration changes come into force.

Responses to consultations may be made public. To keep your response anonymous (including email addresses) tick the box.

Keep my response anonymous