

## 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	
Date	
Name	
Organisation	
Address	
Email address	
Telephone	

#### Consultation questions

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

Comments:

*There is a need to consider the implications of combined elections on the same day where 16 year olds can vote in only one type of election. For example the next Council elections are due in May 2022 as well as the next UK General Election. 16 year olds would be able to vote in the Council elections but not the General Election. Similarly for Welsh Assembly (if those rules were changed) and the Police Commissioner Elections.*

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

**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:

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

Comments:

*A wider range of sources of data is only useful if the data you are using is up to date and accurate. Issues we currently experience with the DWP data for example is that the majority of female applications to be added to the register require them to provide evidence to support their application because DWP still holds the persons maiden name even where they might have married for a number of years.*

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

Comments:

*Current sources used*

- *Council tax records to cross reference applications that need support or querying.*
- *Council tax empty properties used to minimise the number of registration forms dispatched and followed up*
- *School transport admissions – applications for school transport are checked against the register to ensure they live at the address, we then have data of young people eligible to register.*
- *Registrars / Tell us once – registered death records used to remove names from the electoral roll. Citizenship information provided to those who have become eligible to register.*

*If automatic registration came in we would look to extend that to include:*

- *Libraries records*
- *Leisure applications*
- *Mon Housing records*

**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:

With online registration, there just needs to be direction to the registration website to inform them they should register. Ideally, there should be a 'local government' portal that residents can use to update a wide range of information including informing electoral registration, council tax, leisure services etc when they have moved with information on how to update their information, but it needs to be across local authorities not just within them.

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

Comments:

*Already lost a significant amount of control through online registrations. The need for electors to give date of birth and national insurance number before registering, with those checks completed outside the authority, the only thing preventing someone being added to the register is if that verification fails. With those checks already in place and that should be the control mechanism rather than the registration officer.*

**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:

*Where logical reasons apply for individuals being unable to provide the information themselves then yes. For example, we work with care homes to ensure that we have an up to date list of residents and provide them with guidance on how to register and the relevant forms to do so. However, it is still up to the individuals to ensure that they have registered or someone has registered them on their behalf. Block registrations in these circumstances where they are supported by the warden of the care home would ensure that the residents are registered to vote even where they don't intend to use it.*

**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:

*We already do this as per Q9. We have assessed the key registrations groups in the area and identified those who are hardest to reach and put in place mechanisms to ensure we maximise registration in those groups. These are also included in the Electoral Commission performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers.*

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

Comments:

*As per Q7, if there was a portal for residents to do this online and inform us a local authority, this could then be disseminated out with agencies accessing that and all local authorities services benefiting rather than one service.*

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

Comments:

*In order to address the issues being faced because of the introduction of online registration, particularly around duplicate registrations, a single electronic register would be needed to implement the checks against the register etc.*

*It could also allow political parties to standardise their systems and access that directly rather than the current need for local authorities to provide monthly updates in different formats to each political party.*

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

Comments:

*The biggest impact this will have be on the electorate. You could have electors (students for example) who can register and vote at two separate addresses who would have two different voting systems for the same election.*

*Similarly, the ordinary council elections would then have different voting systems for community/town councils than it would for County Councils which adds greater complexity. This doesn't just apply to community/town council elections but all other elections should they be combined on the same day (local elections and general election are both scheduled to fall on same day in 2022, if five year term is implemented).*

*Guidance notes are slightly misleading in that for the regional assembly election and European election, electors still only have one vote for a party and do not rank candidates/parties by preference. The Police commissioner is the only*

*election where electors have to give a first and second choice of candidate and at the last election we had over 2000 blank/spoilt ballot papers for that election.*

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

*Yes, provided there is strong evidence to support a move away from the current system and that the evidence proves participation will be increased.*

*There needs to be evidence that supports the system is broken and that it is the system that is discouraging participation. With turnout in Monmouthshire at the EU referendum of 89% it would suggest that its not the system that is preventing participation more the subject/type of post they are being asked to vote on.*

*If anything needs reforming first, it's the timetable for the election process. Allowing greater time between poll cards being sent and the registration/postal vote deadline would allow electors more time to prepare themselves for the poll. Additionally, allowing more time between the close of nominations and polling day allows candidates more time to campaign, for electors to be more aware an election is taking place, who is standing, and allow systems to be put in place to more widely advertise candidates electronically. For example, allowing candidates to publish their priorities/manifestos online through the Returning Officer with standard criteria similar to the online publication of Police and Crime Commissioner candidates.*

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

Comments:

*Reforming election timetable as above with ability for Returning Officer to publish manifestos of all candidates standing. Lack of information from candidates standing for election is the biggest complaint we have in the office*

*at election time. Could potentially look at setting up a dedicated website for online information from candidates for all elections which negates the need for candidates to be provided with postage-paid literature and could incorporate choice of receipt of information in with registration process.*

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

Comments:

*Yes, particularly at community/town council elections. For example, we had a contested election at the May 2017 elections for a community ward of 36 electors, 4 of those were postal voters. An election of this size would be ideal to run on an all postal basis. That said however, at the local elections where all seats were contested a county wide postal ballot, without a verification process in place for all those electors to confirm it was them completing the postal vote, would be difficult to ensure the integrity of the poll and voters only getting one vote, their own.*

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

Comments:

*Possibly. The previous pilots were held before the need for electors to provide personal identifiers on their postal votes so there is no evidence for that. As above, all postal voting shouldn't be introduced without the checks in place to verify it is the individuals completing the postal vote themselves, this questions the integrity of the election. And again, if the election is combined, then there are different systems in place for different elections which cause extra confusion.*

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

Comments:

*Yes, but the need to have checks in place against who has completed the postal vote should remain. Its now standard practice. The timetable for these elections should be extended to have a period for electors to provide personal identifiers where they are not already registered for a postal vote but how would electors who do not provide the information be able to vote?*

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

Comments:

*It should be starting to be trialled at local elections. Electronic voting during a trial could be run alongside the current system of the Returning Officer providing staff in a polling station who checks the eligibility of electors before having a 'key/code etc' that they can input to allow electors to vote. They could input the*

elector number which marks off the register that they have already voted. There is the obvious initial outlay costs of the equipment but over time would be negated by no longer needing printed papers. The issue for Monmouthshire would be the lack of wifi/3g/4g connectivity to transmit the data to a central place if there is more than one polling station.

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

Comments:

*Electronic voting should be trialled before remote voting takes place. Again, rural authorities may struggle with internet connectivity to enable all residents in an area to cast a vote electronically so we may need to consider physical electronic voting booths in areas where there is a connection in addition to this anyway.*

*Additionally, the timetable for elections doesn't lend itself well to this system of providing the security codes to electors who register close to the deadline. Currently we would not be able to notify electors of their security code until 6 days before an election. At the general election there was 1300 applications to be added to the register on the final day so generating the codes and distributing them in these timescales needs consideration.*

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

Comments:

*If remote or electronic voting is a viable option then the need for electronic counting is no longer needed. Focus should be made to enable electronic or remote voting.*

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

Comments:

*No, for national elections where the ballot paper is the same for all electors mobile polling stations could work. However, in Monmouthshire we had over 65 different ballot papers depending on where you lived at the local elections. Not only would the mobile station need to hold these but it would also need the staff to ensure that they are giving the correct ballot paper to the elector depending on where they reside.*

*Again, as the guidance states, it would need an electronic register to record those who have voted. If it can do this then it should allow electronic voting as well and is why that should be the priority.*

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

Comments:

*This option wouldn't be cost effective without electronic voting for the same reasons as in 24. Polling stations would still need to be open in addition to 'other polling stations' for those in the community who are unable to travel. Additionally, if elections were combined, these would not supersede the rules for say a general election which requires polling stations within polling districts.*

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

Comments:

*Staffing costs will increase for holding the poll on a weekend. Turnout at elections doesn't suggest that holding the poll on a Thursday is a barrier to voting. The hours of poll being 7am until 10pm allow people to fit voting in through their working day as well as having the options of postal and proxy voting. Again, if there is evidence to suggest that participation would increase on a different day then it should be explored but feedback we get is more there is an apathy to voting for a particular government than the day of voting being an issue.*

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

Comments:

*The process of voting by post couldn't be made any simpler. The elector completes an application form with the required information and is sent a postal vote depending on what they have requested. They must provide a signature and date of birth on the postal vote which is compared against the application to ensure it is the elector who has completed the vote, mark the ballot papers and return everything to us.*

*In terms of literature, the postal vote stationery is always being tweaked to ensure that it is as clear as possible and the improvements we have made to the stationery are reflected in the reduction of the number of rejected postal votes over the previous.*

*Additionally, we work with other authorities in the region to try and standardise the postal vote product so that any electors who move within the region receive the same literature which also makes it easier for printers to produce the postal votes in the short timescales available.*

*There is a need to bear in mind that there is limited printed capacity for the production of postal vote materials with only a handful of companies able to produce the 'one piece mailer'. Any changes made should ensure that the manufacturers are consulted to ensure that the changes are viable.*



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

Comments:

**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:

*Security and integrity of the vote has equal importance as the accessibility of the vote. If there is no confidence in the system or the result is in question then regardless of how many people voted, the system will not be fit for purpose.*

*If the voting system were to remain the same then ID should be presented at a polling station. If electronic or remote voting is in the near future then this should be the priority as that should have its own security embedded in to the system.*

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

Comments:

*If electronic or remote voting is the ultimate aim then the security needed to maintain the integrity in those systems will be just as much of a deterrent as it would be to provide ID at a polling station.*

**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:

*I agree but as with parliamentary elections and the candidates having to provide the constituency they reside in, local election candidates should also need to provide the ward they reside in within the local authority so the electorate can see their connection to the area they are standing.*

**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:

*Yes, see response to Q16. However, there needs to be a legislated solution to cover the Returning Officer against candidates who do not provide a statement*

*to ensure that the Returning Officer is not deemed to be favouring candidates who do provide one.*

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

**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:

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

Comments:

*No, as a local authority Monmouthshire has a relatively low electorate but due to the large rural area it covers and the other relevant legislation (such as the number of polling places etc) the costs associated with an election are not related to the number of electors. For example, we had 94 polling stations at the last election some polling station only covering 50 electors. The cost of running that polling station (hire fee, staffing costs, printing of ballot papers & poll cards) for those 50 electors would not cover the actual cost of administering the election for that station.*

**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:

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

Comments:

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

Comments:

**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?**

Comments:

**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.**

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: