

SUBJECT:	ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION AND REFORM WHITE PAPER
MEETING:	Democratic Services Committee
DATE:	21 November 2022
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	N/A

1. PURPOSE:

To note the Welsh Government consultation paper in to Electoral Administration and Reform and consider submitting a response to the consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That councillors consider the paper, in particular the question regarding the term of local councillors, and whether a response should be submitted.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Wales Act 2017 devolved responsibility for local and Senedd elections to Welsh Government and since that time have reviewed and amended the way local and Senedd elections in Wales have been administered through the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 3.2 The White Paper attached to this report is the next phase of Welsh Governments work in reviewing the electoral arrangements within Wales and are seeking views on a number of wide ranging areas to direct their work.
- 3.3 The white paper covers topics including:
- Electronic remote voting and electoral pilots
 - Creation of an all-wales database of electoral registrations
 - A review of some of the conditions of the Elections Act 2022
 - Creation of an Electoral Management Board for Wales
 - Automatic voter registration
 - The role of the Boundary Commission and how it conducts electoral reviews
- 3.4 Many of these proposals will create a divergence in legislative processes between local and senedd elections and those that the UK Government has responsibility for including UK General elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. The impact of this divergence could lead to confusion amongst voters as to what elections they are registered to vote at. For example, electors could be automatically registered to vote for local and Senedd elections but still need to submit an application to register to vote for UK Parliamentary and PCC elections.
- 3.5 Given the likelihood of some of these proposals to split views based on your political persuasion, there is no intention to submit a full response on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee and members are free to respond to the consultation as individual members or political groups if they choose to do so.

3.6 However, question 5 of the consultation refers to the electoral term for County and Community Council elections and directly impacts on elected members. Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 the term of council was changed from 4 years to 5. The aim of the change was to align electoral cycles so that the likelihood of combined polls for different governments was reduced, particularly as at the time of the Act receiving assent, the UK Government relied on the Fixed Term Parliaments Act which set UK General Elections to be held every five years.

3.7 The Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022 removed the requirement for UK General elections to be held every five years and gave discretion back to the current Prime Minister to call an election. Therefore the intention of the five year cycle for local elections to avoid combined polls has been broken.

3.8 The consultation therefore seeks views on whether a five year term for local councils should be retained and councillors may want to consider submitting a view as to its preference if a consensus is clear.

4. REASONS:

To consider implications of the white paper on electoral administration and reform.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

None

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

There are no sustainable development or equality impacts arising from this report.

7. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

There are no safeguarding or corporate parenting implications associated with this report.

8. CONSULTEES:

Democratic Services Committee

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

10. AUTHOR:

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