

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.

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Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.