

## 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	
<b>Date</b>	9 October 2017
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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: The age should be the same for all elections and referendums. There could be significant problems at polling stations should for example parliamentary or Police and Crime Commissioner elections be held on the same day as a local government election.

Not enough information has been provided on how the verification of under 16 year olds works in Scotland.

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

Comments: No comment.

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

Comments: No comment.

**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: Our electoral officers have noted that this may have implications as to the use of the gov.uk registering website if any changes were implemented to the current situation on a Wales only basis.

**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, this would be beneficial.

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

Comments: Data sharing agreements with appropriate external agencies or central government would be useful. These might include the DVLA or Passport Office.

**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: No. Local authority staff do not require access to the register of electors to promote or facilitate registration via the gov.uk website. Widening the access to the register and the ability to amend it are not necessary.

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

Comments: Please see the response to Q7.

Under the current arrangements the controls in place are sufficient and appropriate.

**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: Any proposed changes must be carefully assessed to ensure that they did not detrimentally affect the integrity of the registration system.

**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: The duty to target and promote registration already exists with individual electoral registration officers responsible for directing these activities within their areas.

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

Comments: This depends on the practical aspects of the measures being introduced and the avoidance of duplicating existing processes. The electoral registration officer already has access to such information through council tax records.

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

Comments: There are no clear benefits for this proposal and it is likely to introduce unnecessary problems regarding the production of different registers for parliamentary and local government and the hosting arrangements for the single electronic register. Electors move addresses to various parts of the UK and a single Welsh register appears to be unnecessary.

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

Comments: No – using different voting systems will cause confusion amongst the electorate.

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

Comments: Any major change such as this should have a high level of support, but as the comments for Q13 show, this proposal should not be introduced.

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

Comments: Yes, and having standard terms of office for the different democratic institutions would assist the public's understanding of the election cycles.

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

Comments: Maintaining the integrity of the voting system and the public's faith in it is the primary consideration and any reforms should be measured against these first and foremost.

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

Comments: No.

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

Comments: No. For many electors casting a vote in person is an important part of their duties as electors and this choice should remain. Postal voting requires additional security measures such as signatures and it is not feasible to expect to obtain these from all electors on the register who therefore would be unable to register a vote.

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

Comments: If it is introduced, yes.

**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. See the comments to Q18. Applying different arrangements to different areas will again cause confusion amongst the electorate.

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

Comments: Not at this time. The existing voting and counting arrangements are well-known, respected and trusted whilst the security and integrity of electronic voting systems elsewhere have been called into question. The validity of election results are of paramount importance.

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

Comments: No, please see the comments to Q21.

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

Comments: No – please see the comments to Q21. In addition the costs of electronic counting are thought by electoral administrators to be particularly high.

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

Comments: Polling stations are equipped with the registers for the areas they are covering. Does this option rely on electronic registers and electronic voting (please see comments on these)?

Mobile polling stations could become a cause of confusion.

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

Comments: There have been pilot studies that appear not to have increased overall turnout. This option appears to rely on electronic registers and voting.

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

Comments: No. The current arrangements benefit greatly from being well-known and understood. Supplemented by existing provisions for postal and proxy voting there is no significant benefit to extend the period that would outweigh the problems created in trying to maintain the security of the elections and the costs and availability of polling stations.

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

Comments: The primary concern should be to ensure that the postal voting procedures are as robust as possible. There have been significant cases of election offences relating to postal voting in the UK.

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

Comments: The current arrangements requiring a signature and the elector's date of birth are straightforward and do not appear to be a barrier to electors accessing a postal vote.

**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: It is understood that there will be trials in England in 2018 and the evidence produced should be considered.

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

Comments: Please see the comments to Q29.

**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: Sufficient information should be given on where candidates live as this is an important consideration for many voters.

**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: This is unlikely to be particularly effective as evidenced by the process used for the police and crime commissioner elections. Most electors prefer candidates to approach them through leaflets etc.

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

Comments: No comment.

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

Comments: No comment.

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

Comments: No comment.

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

Comments: No. There should be a clear distinction between an authority’s employees and office holders.

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

Comments: Yes. Certain officer posts need to be politically restricted.

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

Comments: The returning officer needs to be able to direct that appropriate resources are made available for elections. The chief executive is best placed to do this. However, the role of returning officer must remain an independent one to retain the trust of all candidates and the electorate.

**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: Yes, and this is the current position.

**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. A standard formula based on electorate size is unlikely to correctly assess the actual costs of Assembly elections in different types of constituencies.

**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: No comment.

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

Comments: No comment.

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

Comments: No comment.

**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: certainly in Denbighshire the electoral arrangements are bilingual and aim to treat both Welsh and English on an equal basis and we would support an assessment of any advanced proposals for reform.

**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: The Welsh Government's assessment of any proposals would be the process to ensure that both languages were treated equitably and electors were able to use their preferred language.

**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: None.

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