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BRIDGEND TOWN COUNCIL
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Our Ref.: / Ein Cyf.:

CJ/CME

Your Ref.: / Eich Cyf.:

Date: / Dyddiad:

20-7-06

Mrs Ann Jones
Chair
Local Government & Public Services Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Mrs Jones

Electoral Arrangements in Wales

Attached please find the Town Council's comments on the above.

Yours sincerely

Carol James

Carol James (Mrs)
Town Clerk

AGENDA - ITEM 9

ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS IN WALES SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS POSED

The following are suggested replies & comments on the above consultative documents.

Question 1 - No. The bureaucracy required to "police" those who do not respond would surely outweigh any perceived benefits from increasing the numbers registered. There is no guarantee many of these people would actually be interested in casting a vote; otherwise they would already be making more of an effort to ensure they were registered.

Question 2 - Wider publicity to young people between the ages of 16 – 19 by way of suitable internet sites, TV advertising at the time of teenage programmes, leaflets issued to all 6th formers at schools and everybody registering for college and university courses, plus job centres, local youth service facilities, recreation centres etc, shops frequented by young people.

Question 3 - Appears a massive departure from the current system which will confuse regular voters and will rely on everyone attending a polling station with personal ID. If they have nothing with them, they will be denied a vote. How would this work in the case of voters not attending a polling station but voting by another approved method?

Question 4 - If such information already exists, then it could be used but what guarantee is there that it is complete and accurate?

Question 5 - More information available in other languages and distributed through places of worship and community organisations.

Question 6 - The mechanisms of voting by post is still more complicated and confusing for many than just turning up at a polling station where professional help is at hand! Recent elections indicate that around 30% of postal votes issued are never returned – and these were actually requested! There is no clear indication that sending a postal vote to everyone would dramatically increase the response. It is also felt that large scale postal voting would be open to abuse.

Question 7 - Difficult to have faith in such methods as it would be impossible for observers of the election to have an overview of everything that was going on during the process. Security of these various suggested methods is paramount.

Question 8 - Wherever the most convenient location in any community is situated. Now we have lost the use of most schools, many alternative polling stations being used are not as central as hitherto. Any premises used must have sufficient space for a secure and efficient process.

Questions 9 - 13 - Clearly with the trend of voters under 25 in sharp decline; a whole range of educational methods in schools, colleges and universities would be desirable. Any involvement at such institutions must be carefully regulated to ensure no political party "hi-jacks" the situation.

Question 14 - Perhaps local social services departments of councils should become more proactive in this regard.

Question 15 - Postal votes must be the most practical answer for disabled people who find their local polling station, for whatever reason, difficult to access.

Question 16 - Almost impossible to ensure with regard to polling stations. With a clear move away from traditional methods of voting at polling stations, standardising becomes more difficult to envisage.

Question 17 - Sounds a very expensive and cumbersome option.

Question 18 - Would have expected any problems encountered to be reported already as a matter of course.

Question 19 - Seems adequate already for our area.

Question 20 - Local councils should be best placed to know of any particular ethnic communities in their area and deal with the issue accordingly.

Question 21 - All election literature needs to have as few fundamental words as possible, block capitals being the preferred print style wherever practical for those with sight and reading difficulties.

OTHER MATTERS NEEDING TO BE RAISED ON A NATIONAL BASIS

a) Days and Times of Polling

With the decline in polling; has it something to do with using our traditional day of THURSDAY?

It may be that a weekend day would now be convenient for more voters, indeed holding an election over TWO DAYS might produce a higher turnout.

Time of poll should be standardised, preferably 7 am – 10 pm for ALL elections.

b) Local Government By-Elections – Town/Community Councils

It has become very clear to our council that the cost of holding such mid-term/occasional by-elections is now becoming a very expensive option.

A recent by-election with a 19% turn out cost our Council £3644 as shown in Appendix A attached.

This works out at £4.55 for every vote cast.

Indeed, in the course of a 4 year life of a town/community council, several such by-elections might occur and a considerable and disproportionate cost for local tax payers would follow.

It may be that serious consideration should be given to having co-option mid term as the only option to fill vacant seats, thus saving considerable expense.

There should also be a preference for conducting the count at any such by-elections on the next normal working day for the organising council thus saving, in our case, 15% of the total costs of the election by avoiding the need for late evening overtime payments to counting staff etc.

Cllr David Unwin
Leader of Council