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TOWN CLERK: Gareth Nickels
TOWN MAYOR: Councillor B. Blakeley

Our Ref: W05/wag220806
Your Ref:
Date: 22nd August 2006

Local Government & Public Services Committee (Electoral Arrangements)
National Assembly for Wales
Assembly Offices
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Sir or Madam

Electoral Arrangements in Wales – Consultation Document

I refer to the above consultation document which has been the subject of consideration by the Town Council, and enclose herewith my Members views on the questions raised.

Yours sincerely

Town Clerk

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS

1	<i>Although registration is compulsory in Wales, the penalties for non registration are hardly ever used. Should penalties be used and would this encourage more people to register?</i>
Response	It is difficult to know how effective penalties would be in reducing the non registration rate as they do not appear to have been properly implemented as the law intended. Perhaps prior to seeking to change the registration method relevant local authorities should be required to implement the current system as originally intended within the legislation to enable a judgement to be made as to its effectiveness or otherwise. This could be done by a targeting an area with year on year known poor registration rate.
2	<i>What methods could be used to ensure that more people living with their parents, who have moved recently or are living in rented accommodation register?</i>
Response	The Initial Registration of electors could be linked to the initial issue of the National Insurance Number. Consideration should be given to requiring Landlords to register or notify new tenants to the Electoral Registration Office.
3	<i>Will individual registration with personal identification help to increase registration? Will it help to make voting more secure is the personal identification has to be produced before you can vote?</i>
Response	Yes – See answer 2
4	<i>Should there be some form of automatic registration as in other countries? If yes, What sources of information could be used to ensure that everyone was automatically registered.</i>
Response	Yes – Linked to issue of National Insurance Number - For students in further education it might be accomplished by requiring Colleges/Universities to identify student registrations on courses and when allocating halls of residency
5	<i>What methods could be used to encourage more Black and Ethnic Minority people to register?</i>
Response	More local contact by local Councillors More liaison between Electoral Registration Officers and community leaders

6	<p><i>Would an all postal vote be workable in Wales?</i></p> <p><i>Please give your reasons for your views.</i></p>
Response	<p>Any system can be made to be workable if sufficient resources are targeted and committed to the process however the amount of resources which would need to be targeted are likely to outweigh the final benefits achieved and would in any case not guarantee voter participation.</p> <p>Given the past experience in other areas of the UK more appropriate security measures would need to be identified to enable confidence in an all postal vote system. Areas such as those with a high density of Houses in Multiple occupation which have high levels of occupancy turnover would be particularly at risk from fraud due to the nature of such buildings</p>
7	<p><i>What forms of electronic voting (e.g. internet, text, at polling stations) could be used in Wales?</i></p> <p><i>What could be the benefits/problems of using the methods you have suggested?</i></p>
Response	<p>Electronic voting might be beneficial for the younger more computer literate generations however it would be less so for the older voter.</p> <p>Perhaps a more beneficial system would be to increase the number of places where voting can occur making it easier for people to cast their vote – for example shopping centres, post offices. Mobile polling stations could visit a number of larger employers.</p> <p>These alternative polling stations could be electronically linked to avoid persons from voting at two locations. This would also remove the need for a person to have to physically vote within their Ward as is currently the case.</p>
8	<p><i>Could alternative venues be used as polling stations? (e.g. supermarkets, post offices etc)</i></p>
Response	<p>See Answer 7 above.</p> <p>Security and manpower factors would need to be considered – It would be inappropriate for the WAG to require Unitary Authorities or Local Councils to meet the cost of the process.</p>
9	<p><i>Why do so few young people in Wales vote?</i></p> <p><i>Please give any examples you have come across (leaving out any personal details)</i></p>
Response	<p>Young people are starting off in work or college. Their priorities are to raise cash and have a home. They find it difficult to relate how local or national government will help them out individually with these priorities.</p>
10	<p><i>Are young people given enough information in schools to make an informed decision about how they are going to vote?</i></p>

Response	<p>The current system of school councils should be further encouraged and perhaps be empowered to make meaningful decisions on life within the schools – Links to local community councils could be especially beneficial in this area as well as general citizenship education.</p> <p>Not enough information is provided in secondary schools, teenagers are cynical (see response 9) and need to pass exams. Young people see little need to get involved with community, especially if they see how their parents have not gained anything from their involvement.</p>
11	<p><i>Should party politics be taught in schools?</i></p> <p><i>If so, how?</i></p> <p><i>If not, why not?</i></p>
Response	<p>Presentations could be provided by political parties within schools as long as they were balanced across the political spectrum and took account of time restraints within schools.</p> <p>Schools should be encouraged to participate in their local communities and become involved in community issues. Pupils of secondary schools who offer ideas for the communities around them and who get involved in the communities should be encouraged.</p> <p>There is a perceptions that schools are there only for the passing of exams or to facilitate employment opportunities or entry to further education. The role and responsibilities of the school in the local community needs to clarified</p>
12	<p><i>Should political parties be involved in informing young people about politics in schools and other youth groups?</i></p>
Response	<p>See 11 above</p>
13	<p><i>Are there examples of good practice in informing young people about politics in your area?</i></p> <p><i>Please tell us about them (leaving out any personal details).</i></p>
Response	<p>Local primary schools in the Rhyl area have operated school councils for a number of years - Ysgol Emmanuel, Rhyl for example empowered the Council to make decisions which directly impacted on school life and led to the introduction of playground furniture within the school – By enabling real decisions to be made by the children which resulted in actual developments on the school campus the children will have been encouraged to recognise for themselves the importance of democratic process</p> <p>Similar encouragement should be developed within secondary schools.</p>
14	<p><i>Is there enough provision for people with disabilities to help with the registration process?</i></p> <p><i>If not, what practical things could be done?</i></p>

Response	<p>There is a requirement for Polling Stations to be located within the relevant electoral Ward. Often this results in inappropriate buildings being utilised when a more suitable facility in terms of location and amenities exists but is just outside the relevant Ward.</p> <p>This can lead to buildings being utilised which are not accessible to wheelchairs etc.</p> <p>Postal and Proxy voting should be encouraged but more time needs to be made available for disabled people to vote.</p>
15	<p><i>Is there enough provision for people with disabilities to help with voting?</i></p> <p><i>If not, what practical things could be done?</i></p>
Response	<p>Perhaps the employment of Disabled staff within Polling Stations would help identify problems and through publicity reduce and break down barriers.</p>
16	<p><i>Should there be statutory standards for the accessibility of registration and voting material and polling stations?</i></p>
Response	<p>The current rules relating to DDA legislation should be applicable to polling stations if they are not already.</p>
17	<p><i>What are your views on the use of mobile ballot boxes for people who have difficulty getting to polling stations?</i></p>
Response	<p>In cases such as nursing homes or hospitals this could be of immense benefit especially where people are reluctant to go out such as residential homes.</p>
18	<p><i>Should polling station managers be required to produce a report similar to that in the Netherlands?</i></p>
Response	<p>Yes but not on the day of the election - The Presiding Officer is required to control the station from early morning to late evening and has responsibility for completing a number of complicated forms for the Returning Officer prior to often having to deliver the ballot box to the count station. There is often pressure placed on the Presiding Officer to deliver the box with as much speed as possible to enable counting to proceed.</p>
19	<p><i>What are your views on the availability of help and advice available bilingually at elections in Wales?</i></p>
Response	<p>The composition of the local population (perhaps by way of the ten yearly census records) should determine the level of translation required. Polling stations are required to display a large number of information posters with each requiring translations which discourages people from absorbing the information. Alternatively the amount of information required to be displayed could be limited to perhaps a list of candidates with other information available on request or in leaflet format</p>

20	<i>What could be done in terms of documents and advice to encourage more BME people to register and vote?</i>
Response	<p>The BME community itself should be encouraged to put forward candidates for election which in itself would generate interest and encourage participation.</p> <p>There should be more liaisons between Electoral Officers and community leaders and the local councillors.</p>
21	<i>Do you consider the forms and information given about registration and voting to be straightforward and easily understandable?</i>
Response	<p>The format of the forms seem to change on an annual basis suggesting that a standard form is not required in law – perhaps this should be required.</p> <p>However the forms will only be read if people feel a need or desire to vote and an interest in the system. As such the forms should be user friendly and include details of the benefits of voting and how it can make a difference.</p>
Additional Comments	<p>It should also be noted that the failure to register has a detrimental effect on other areas such as Section 137 of the Local Government Act, 1972 which regulates the ability of local community councils to spend monies on activities not otherwise provided for in Law.</p> <p>People need to have a purpose in voting – If it seems that nothing changes no matter how they vote then disillusionment sets in.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to changing the voting day from Thursday to the Weekends (perhaps over two days) to encourage people who work to exercise their vote.</p> <p>More ongoing contact between Electoral Registration Officers and organisations within the local community should be identified as good practice and encourage participation and people to get involved.</p> <p>Meetings of local authorities and bodies such as the Welsh Assembly's Regional Committees should be held at different times of the day (including weekends) to facilitate participation by the local community.</p> <p>Where elections and particularly bye-elections are held the costs should be met by central government and not by local councils or unitary authorities. This would lead to a more consistent approach to elections. Currently it is far more cost effective for Councils to co-opt new Members than hold an election and this often means that minimum publicity is given to Casual Vacancies to avoid the costs of holding a full election. - The funding of elections should be considered as part of this consultation as the reluctance of Local Councils to incur the expenses of elections can undermine voter participation. For example displaying a Notice of election is free in the local Post Office but is unlikely to be seen or read by the local population. It would be more effective to advertise the vacancy within local press but this incurs cost to the local Council.</p>

If an election is called a decision is required as to whether to issue Poll Cards which can be expensive and is at the cost of the local Council.

The staffing of the Polling Station and Count is undertaken at the direction of the Returning Officer and is recharged to the local Council. The Town and Community Council's have very little input into the level's of fees charged by the Unitary Authority but must meet these charges.

The above can have a major impact on the budgets of local Council especially if more than one Casual Vacancy arises in a twelve month period and creates a potential negative view towards encouraging the holding of elections as opposed to the co-opting of new Councillors.

Any new proposals implemented should take account of the additional financial burden placed on smaller Councils particularly in regards to additional staffing and these costs should be met centrally.