

62



Cyngor Sir Penfro - Pembrokeshire County Council

Your ref
Eich cyfeirnod
My ref
Fy nghyfeirnod
Please ask for
Gofynnwch am
Telephone
Ffôn
Date
Dyddiad

Caroline Banner
01437 776533
1st September 2006

BRYN PARRY-JONES, M.A. (OXON)
Chief Executive *Prif Weithredwr*

Pembrokeshire County Council, County Hall, HAVERFORDWEST, Pembrokeshire, SA61 1TP
Cyngor Sir Penfro, Neuadd y Sir, HWLFFORDD, Sir Benfro, SA61 1TP

DX 98295 HAVERFORDWEST
Telephone 01437 764551
Fax 01437 776490
DX 98295 HWLFFORDD
Ffôn 01437 764551
Ffacs 01437 776490

www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Ann Jones AM
Chair, Local Government and Public Services Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Ann

Electoral Arrangements in Wales

Thank you for your letter of 2nd June enclosing your Committee's Discussion Document and inviting my views. You and your colleagues have clearly had opportunities to hear from a range of interested parties and to view systems and arrangements elsewhere. You therefore raise a number of interesting questions; some of which I feel able to offer views upon in the Annex attached to this letter. There have been developments since I gave evidence to the Committee, most notably the passing of the Electoral Administration Act 2006. I do not, however, intend intentionally to repeat the evidence I gave which I note and appreciate has been taken into account in the formulation of your Discussion Document.

I wish you and your colleagues well in your continuing work and trust that my further views may assist.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive/Returning Officer



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL

**Responses to questions in "Electoral Arrangements in Wales -
A Discussion Document"**

1. Information, publicity and encouragement are more likely to be cost effective than prosecution of individuals which would be expensive and inevitably limited in its effectiveness. Whilst reporting of such action in the press might encourage some immediate interest and compliance, the impact on the annual canvass is unlikely to be great. Whilst some ERO's have always carried out extensive measures to make the canvass as comprehensive as possible and to publicise the process, the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 will make such standards uniform across the country. I believe, therefore, that these provisions should now be the focus as they are more likely to produce greater compliance.
2. The consistent provision of information about registration when individuals come into contact with a new local authority for the first time would assist. In many ways, a requirement for individual registration would be beneficial for people moving to live with their parents or into HMO's as the tendency now will probably be to wait and rely upon the annual canvass for those who are interested. Many local authorities regularly publicise registration in free newspapers delivered to all properties but hard to reach groups are less likely to read such publications.
3. Individual registration is unlikely to increase registration, probably the opposite. The production of personal identification for absent (postal) voting will help to make such voting more secure. Such requirements in polling stations, however, do not appear to be necessary at this stage as no significant evidence of fraud when voting personally has been detected.
4. There is some merit in examining other existing systems such as National Insurance. What is not known is the accuracy of their database and whether changes of address are established and recorded in a timely fashion through employers, job centres and Inland Revenue etc. If a comprehensive and mandatory ID system is established and proves effective, automatic registration could follow.
5. Further targeting of such groups by the Electoral Commission and local authorities.
6. All postal voting on a regional basis was tried at the last European Parliamentary Elections. Serious difficulties were encountered with the integrity of the process and the administrative arrangements.
7. There continue to be concerns about the integrity of remote voting by internet and text. Electronic voting machines in polling stations are effective and make counting quick and easy; the drawback is the cost of implementation and maintenance.

8. Polling Stations can be established in such places now but only for elections in that polling district. To allow voters from other polling districts to use such polling stations would require significant investment in technology to ensure that multiple voting did not occur. This could happen in conjunction with the introduction of on-line electronic voting machines in all polling stations.
9. - 13. It is important to ensure education without bias and undue influence in a particular direction. Creating access by representatives of political parties to school pupils or in youth clubs would have to be regulated accordingly. There are longstanding conventions that local authority employees including teachers should avoid party political bias when undertaking their duties. Many authorities promote programmes in secondary schools about the electoral process. For example, in Pembrokeshire, the County Council has run a series of 6th Form Conferences in all eight of its secondary schools entitled "Your Council, Your Call", in which pupils take on the roles of Councillors and Council officers, and for a slightly younger age group, the Council assists the young people in running Mock Elections. These programmes have been running since the late 1990's.
14. The canvass requirements in the 2006 Act effectively provide for personal household attendance. Perhaps this issue could be the subject of guidance and training for canvassers?
15. Polling Station staff are now trained and a consistent part of such training is sensitivity to this issue together with practical guidance. There are many good examples of staff now providing effective assistance. One aspect which has caused concern is postal voting for residents of Nursing and Elderly Persons Homes. In Pembrokeshire, I have arranged for an authorised electoral officer (who also works in Social Care) to visit each County Council Home to assist residents in postal voting, if they so wish. A formal procedure has been established to ensure integrity of the system.
16. Certain standards are now required and materials are provided such as specimen large ballot papers and voting aids for the visually impaired. Enhanced standards would require funding. These continue to be concerns about limited choices for polling stations particularly in rural areas.
17. Postal voting is universally available and probably more practical. Returning Officers could have discretion to use a ballot box in such places as Nursing and Elderly Persons Homes without having to establish a polling station, which requires full opening hours and wider access.
18. Many Returning Officers ask for reports from Presiding Officers and have inspectors visiting Polling Stations and reporting back.
- 19.-21. Much work has been and continues to be done about standardisation of forms and materials which are produced in Welsh and many are also available through the Electoral Commission in other languages. Simplicity of language is less evident, the practical difficulty being that we are dealing with a legal process which has to be described accurately to avoid misleading

voters. However, Electoral Staff are now regularly trained including in customer care which helps them to identify and support voters who require assistance.