Making it easier to vote

Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GORSAF BLEIDLEISIO POLLING STATION

This consultation is also available in Welsh.

Hello

Voting in elections is an important way to make your voice heard on issues that concern you. The Welsh Government wants to change the law and improve how local elections and Senedd elections are run in Wales.

We want to know what you think of our plans.

Please click on this link to answer the questions as you go along.

This is a summary. There are other proposals in the full consultation here.

About Senedd Cymru — Welsh Parliament.

The Senedd makes laws for Wales, controls Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account. It makes decisions about Wales, in Wales, for Wales.

The Senedd doesn't have power over all laws, some of them are controlled by the UK Government. That includes laws about UK general elections.

The Senedd lowered the voting age so 16-17-year-olds can vote in local and Senedd elections.

The Welsh Government

The Welsh Government is led by the First Minister. We have lots of different people working across Wales to support people's lives.

Timeline

How we have changed elections in Wales

The Wales Act 2017 — This made it possible for decisions about improving Welsh elections to be made in Wales.

In 2017 — We asked people in Wales how they would like elections to change.

The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 — These laws have changed local elections and Senedd elections including:
- lowering the voting age to 16
- giving foreign nationals who live in Wales the power to vote
- giving local authorities power to change their voting system.

Now — **We want to know what you think about our plans to improve the election process across Wales.**

Our vision

Wales is a place where it is easy for every citizen to get involved in our democracy, have a say in elections and vote.

The principles

We have 6 principles that these changes are built on.

Equity — Everyone that wants to take part and vote can. They are safe and respected no matter who they are.

Accessibility — Taking part and voting is easy to do at every level of democracy.

Participation — Everyone can have their right to vote.

Improving citizen experience — Everyone can get involved with shaping their communities and country.

Simplicity — Standing for election, registering to vote and voting are straightforward and easy to do.

Integrity — Everyone in Wales can trust the electoral system and information about elections.

? **Do you agree with the six principles?**

Yes   No   Don't know

Our long term aims for elections

Everyone who is eligible and wants to vote should be able to. No one should miss their opportunity to vote because of practical issues, disability, lack of information or any other reason.

We are committed to making sure voting is easy, fair and accessible for everyone.

Promoting Diversity

Our communities are made up of lots of different people, different ages, backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. We want political parties to promote diversity so everyone who wants to, can stand for election, get involved and vote.

We are committed to making sure all communities are represented in local elections and the Senedd.

Online voting

No one should miss their opportunity to vote for any reason, such as being out of the country or in hospital.

Many people have asked for new ways to vote. Some would like a secure, online voting system that's easy-to-use on their computer or smartphone. But some people are concerned that technology and voting systems aren't secure enough yet and their details wouldn't be safe.

We're not planning on moving to an online voting system yet. We want to know if people think we should research this more.

Do you think online voting is a good idea?
Yes   No   Don't know
Why?

An All-Wales Database

We want to make sure it's easy for people to register to vote. It's important that information is up-to-date and if someone moves area, their details aren't on the register for more than one place.

A new All-Wales Database could help make sure this happens. It could give people a single **unique identifier code** that can be used to:

- keep records up to date
- spot if someone is on more than one register
- give people more ways to vote in the future.

Moving to an All-Wales Database would take time, resources and money. So, we're still deciding if this is a good idea.

Do you think an All-Wales Database is a good idea?
Yes   No   Don't know
Why?

Term lengths

Local Councils, and Town and Community Councils run for five years between elections. Some people think this is good because it:

- currently lines up with other elections
- stops too many elections happening at the same time
- gives councils time to plan and make changes to their area.

Others think it should have a four-year term because it:

- gives voters more power to make councils accountable
- gives them the power to vote for someone new if they aren't happy.

Do you think it should be:
Four years?
Five years?
Why?

Making registration easier

Who can vote?

To vote in local elections or Senedd elections a person must:

- be eligible to register to vote in the local area
- be 16 or older on polling day
- not be in prison, or have another legal reason that stops them voting
- be one of the following:
  - a British citizen, Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of the Republic of Ireland
  - a foreign citizen with a legal right to live in the UK
  - a citizen of an EU country.

These rules aren't always easy for people to understand. Also, because the UK has left the European Union, we need to think about what to do.

We could:

- re-write the law to make it easier to understand
- update the law now that the UK has left the EU (Brexit).

Whatever we choose, we want it to be clear and easy for people to understand.

Do you think making it clear who can vote is a good idea?

Yes   No   Don't know

Why?

Automatic registration

To take part in elections, people must register to vote.

Every year, the local authority checks their voter register. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) contact each household to check who lives there. This helps keep details up-to-date and identify new people who are invited to register.

In 2017 we asked people if EROs should be able to add new people to the register using information about who lives locally. **77%** thought it was a good idea. So do we.

We want to work with EROs to try automatic registering in some areas to make sure everyone can be added safely.

> **How would you want to be told you have been registered to vote automatically and that your personal data is safe?**

Improving student registration rates

Many students study in Wales. Lots of them don't register to vote, or vote in elections.

We think allowing students to register during their enrolment week is a good idea. This could be done by sharing information between the University and the Local Authority.

Students would get an invitation to vote with the University information pack. Universities would collect these, check them and send them on to the Local Authority's Electoral Services Team.

This has been tried in Cardiff. **8,340** students registered.

We want to work with Local Authorities and Universities to set this up in other areas.

> **Do you think this is a good idea?**
> **Yes   No   Don't know**
> **Why?**

Information

People need information that's easy to understand and up to date to help them make decisions about voting. Some people have told us that they:

- find politics and elections confusing
- find elections boring
- can't find enough information about candidates and political parties.

Information about elections comes from different places.

The Electoral Commission tells people about elections. That includes how to register to vote, applying for a postal or proxy vote and giving people other information they need to vote.

Local authorities let voters know when elections are taking place and where they can vote.

Candidates standing for elections tell people about who they are and what party, if any, they are linked to.

We want:

- to improve information for everyone, including disabled people and people with learning disabilities
- to have one online place where people can find what they need
- to develop guidelines so information is easy to read and understand.

ℹ **Postal voting** – if you are not able to get to a polling station, you can vote by post.

ℹ **Proxy voting** – if you are not at home or available on voting day, you can get someone else to vote for you.

? Do you think these are good ideas?

Yes   No   Don't know

Why?

Removing barriers for disabled people

Some disabled people face challenges when they vote. That includes issues using the buildings where polling stations are.

We are working with the Electoral Commission and local authorities to improve things. This includes developing new guidance and training for polling station staff.

Polling stations must have devices that help voters who are blind or have sight loss.

The Elections Act 2022 means local authorities in England have to work out what is best for their voters. We are thinking about the best approach on this for Wales.

? How can disabled voters be supported to vote secretly and independently?

Supporting young people

In Wales 16-17-year-olds can now vote in local elections and Senedd elections.

Being able to vote is important. We don't want anyone to miss out because of lack of information, knowledge or understanding.

The Curriculum for Wales is designed to prepare learners for their future. This includes helping them learn about politics, democracy, elections and their right to vote. We will support schools so learners get the skills they need to be active citizens. We've also developed resources to help explain elections in Wales and the UK.

? What else could we do to support young people to vote?

Making it safer for candidates

We want to make sure candidates are safe. Sometimes candidates face bullying, online abuse, hate crimes, and harassment. This can happen more if the candidate is female, LGBTQ+, or from an ethnic minority.

Guidance for Candidates on how they can campaign safely has been published by the police, the Electoral Commission and the local authorities.

In England, the Elections Act 2022 protects the right of candidates to not be influenced by others and therefore to act by their own free will. This is called "undue influence". In Wales, we would like this to happen as well.

We also want to take actions in these **7 areas:**

- **Evidence:** We want to collect data about abuse of candidates to monitor the problem better.
- **Communication:** We want to communicate better to identify and reduce abuse.
- **Costs:** We want candidates to be able to claim money to protect themselves from abuse or get help quick.
- **Support and advice:** We want candidates to have more information on safety and what to do if they experience abuse.
- **Online abuse:** We want to avoid abuse on social media.
- **Statement of Persons Nominated:** We want to avoid candidates having to put their home address on public documents, like the 'Statement of Persons Nominated' form.

Do you think these actions will reduce abuse and make candidates safer?

Yes   No   Don't know

Why?

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Modernising Welsh elections

Advance voting

We want to make voting as easy as possible. In the 2022 local elections we tried something new. People in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen and some people in Bridgend were able to vote before polling day and at a location more convenient to them.

The Electoral Commission asked people what they thought and gathered evidence. They found:

- voters were happy with their experience of advance voting
- voters liked the flexibility and choice, but it didn't increase the number of people who voted.

We are still considering this, and other options. For example: we could give people more days to vote and more places to vote like colleges, schools, workplaces.

Do you think this is a good idea?

Yes   No   Don't know

What else would encourage people to vote?

Applying for postal or proxy votes (absent voting)

The UK Elections Act 2022 has powers to set up an online Absent Voting Application system that would allow people to apply for postal or proxy votes at UK general elections or police and crime commissioner elections.

This new online system would:

- make it easier to apply for a postal or proxy vote for those elections
- check a person's identity and stop errors.

We are thinking about having the same kind of system for Senedd and local government elections in Wales.

Do you think this is a good idea?

Yes   No   Don't know

Why?

Improving postal voting

The number of Welsh voters using postal voting is going up. In the 2021 Senedd Election:

- over **458,000** postal votes were issued
- an increase of more than **16%** since 2016.

Postal voting is flexible. People can vote in their own home, in their own time. But, there are concerns:

- sometimes people don't know that their postal vote has been received
- sometimes they fill it in wrong, and it's rejected. This means that their vote doesn't count.

We are interested in introducing a **postal vote electronic tracking system**. This would tell people if their postal vote has been received or if they've made a mistake. It would give them time to correct it so that their vote counts. This would make people more confident to vote by post and reduce the number of postal votes rejected.

Do you think an electronic tracking system is a good idea?

Yes   No   Don't know

Why?

Digital registers

In the 2022 local elections, instead of paper registers, some local authorities tried out Digital Registers at their polling stations.

The Electoral Commission asked people what they thought and collected evidence. They found that:

- it made things a lot quicker
- it was more flexible for voters
- most local authorities wanted to keep using the system in the future.

Some local authorities were concerned about:

- the costs of changing
- the privacy and security of people's information.

Although we are not thinking of making the use of Digital Registers mandatory now, we would like to continue encouraging their use at future elections.

Do you think Digital Registers are a good idea?

Yes   No   Don't know

Why?

One last thing

? Do you think our proposals will have positive or negative effects on the Welsh language? Can you explain what you think the effects will be?

? Is there anything else we need to think about when making changes to elections in Wales?

Thanks for reading this

Please click on this link to answer the questions or send your answers to:

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