

## **Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill - Children's Rights Impact Assessment**

### **1. Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on children and young people.**

1.1 The Programme for Government was published on 17 June 2021 setting out ambitious commitments to be delivered between 2021 and 2026 to improve the lives of people across Wales. It is important that the Senedd and local government closely represent the communities they serve, and the Programme for Government includes a commitment to reform local government to reduce the democratic deficit. Our vision is for Wales to be a place where it is easy for every citizen to get involved in our democracy, have a say in elections and vote.

1.2 In June 2021 the Welsh Government announced an ambitious programme of electoral reform to build on work delivered in the fifth Senedd including extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds through the Local Government Elections Wales Act and Senedd Elections Wales Act 2021. On 29 July 2021 the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution published a written statement setting out a set of priorities to enable more newly enfranchised voters and existing voters to register and vote in the local government elections in 2022. In relation to children and young people we successfully:

- worked with local authorities and the electoral community to increase registration, especially through working with schools.
- built on existing channels to increase overall democratic engagement including helping young people understand the impact that local government has on their lives.
- supported four principal councils to deliver a selection of flexible voting pilots to test different forms of advanced voting including giving young people the opportunity to vote at school and college.

1.3 The Bill makes provision for simplifying and strengthening administration of Welsh elections, improve participation by voters and candidates and introduce broader improvements to the operation of local democracy. In developing our proposals, we have considered what additional mechanisms can be put in place through legislative and non legislative means to increase the participation of young people in the democratic process. We know that 31,078 young people aged 16 and 17 years old were registered to vote in 2021 and work undertaken since then has seen local authorities improve this number further. We want to build on this work with approaches designed to engage and enthuse young people to register to vote and become active democratic citizens.

1.4 1.5 In October 2022 we consulted on a wide set of proposals to reform Welsh elections. As part of our consultation, we published a version for young people. We received 39 responses to the youth friendly version of which the majority

were broadly supportive of those provisions which impact most on young people. A summary of consultation responses is published on the Welsh Government's website. [Electoral administration and reform White Paper | GOV.WALES](#)

1.5 We held a White Paper launch event for young people, engaged with children and young people through networks and events and are supporting a number of organisations through our Democratic Engagement Grant who will work directly with young people on the importance of democracy and having their voices heard. We will continue to engage with the Democratic Engagement Partnership set up in 2021 to encourage young people to register to vote. This partnership provides an opportunity to work with a large number of groups across Wales and aims to support young people in engaging with democracy and building confidence to take part in elections.

## **2. Explain how the proposal is likely to impact on children's rights**

2.1 The White Paper asked over 80 questions about proposals to:

- promote engagement in elections;
- make standing for election safer and more straight forward;
- modernise the administration of elections;
- improve the conduct of electoral and community reviews for local government;
- consolidate electoral law; and
- longer-term propositions for electoral reform to support Welsh democracy in the future.

2.2 The following measures which particularly impact on children and young people will be taken forward in this Senedd through a range of legislative and non legislative vehicles:

- Providing clearer information for voters in Welsh elections by requiring Ministers to ensure a Voter Information Platform is created.
- We will work with local authorities in Wales to design and pilot the registration of electors without application for Welsh elections. We believe a more straightforward registration process will particularly benefit newly enfranchised 16 and 17 year olds helping to develop their relationship with democracy in Wales and could increase their participation in Senedd and local elections.
- Supporting learners to become active citizens through the Curriculum for Wales. We will work with education partners and local authorities to develop a framework for supporting schools in ensuring learners have opportunities to increase understanding of democracy and promotes a lifelong habit of participation.

- Improving student registration rates by working with local authorities and higher education institutions to establish data sharing agreement allowing students to register to vote during their enrolment week.
- 2.3 Almost 65% of respondents to the youth friendly consultation said improving student registration rates was a good idea, empowering students to feel a sense of belonging to the area in which they are studying. It was noted that this would help close gaps in registration rates of young people who do not (or cannot) register when they are 16 and 17. Respondents also highlighted the need to provide better political education in schools with some responses pointing towards the need for better voter information and clearer mandates from politicians.
- 2.4 A range of services and powers are devolved to the Welsh Government and local authorities which impact on the rights of children and young people for example education, social care, housing, environmental services, and safeguarding vulnerable adults and children. Measures being taken forward in the Bill to improve learners' understanding of democracy, particularly the Voter Information Platform, and encouraging those who are eligible to vote in Senedd and local elections will have a positive impact on children rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Bill and our wider reform package will provide more opportunities for children and young people to seek and receive information on decisions which affect them (article 13 of the Rights of the Child), tell elected members what they think should happen and have their views and interests taken into account, (article 3 and 12 of the Rights of the Child), and have their rights respected, protected and fulfilled (article 4 of the Rights of the Child).
- 2.5 Research undertaken by the [Electoral Commission](#) on the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers suggests that young people are less likely to be registered to vote. The requirement for Electoral Registration Officers to add people to the local government register without application would therefore disproportionately benefit this under-registered cohort. In taking forward these new provisions, the Government intends to make regulations to remove the open electoral register in Wales for Welsh elections to add additional safeguards for young and vulnerable electors. Following those regulations, the details of registered elector for local elections in Wales will only appear on the closed local government electoral register. While organisations will still be able to access this register, they will only be able to do so if they have a legal right to the information held on the closed electoral register.
- 2.6 It is important that the changes which impact young people, how they vote and their participation in our democracy is communicated to them effectively and in an appropriate way. The recent changes to the curriculum will help us to achieve this. Alongside a general public information scheme on electoral changes, and local information provided to citizens ahead of elections

provided by the Electoral Commission and local authorities, we will use a number of communication channels to reach young people at the appropriate time, when these policies would come into effect. This will include the use of social media and working with schools, youth groups and universities to support a communication campaign. We will ensure that young people know how to cast their vote and also where to find information about who they can vote for.

2.7 While not directly targeted at children and young people the following provisions could have an impact on the rights of children and young people:

- Improvements to the arrangements for reviewing and changing electoral arrangements across Wales to support a healthy and strong democracy, where local people are engaged in decisions that impact on their daily lives. Ensuring the appropriate level of representation will allow a greater debate about local matters impacting children and young people and the potential to address those matters.
- Introduction of modernised language for the undue influence offence for Welsh elections will make it simpler for the police to take action when allegations of undue influence are made and will provide a strengthened deterrent to individuals seeking to unfairly influence someone's vote. As the franchise for Welsh elections extends to 16 and 17 year olds this action will help to ensure young people continue to be free to express their views through their democratic rights (Article 13) and are protected from other types of exploitation (Article 36).
- With the reduction in the minimum voting age in Welsh elections to 16, many young people now have the opportunity to vote while they are still in education. Some responses to the young people's white paper consultation expressed the need for better voter information and clearer mandates from politicians. The establishment of an Electoral Management Board in Wales to support the co-ordination of elections and act as host for a Welsh elections information platform will help achieve this.