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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government
Consultation – summary of responses

Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales

April 2018

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Welsh Government issued the consultation document, Electoral Reform in Local Government in Wales on 18 July 2017. The consultation period ran for twelve weeks to 10 October 2017.
- 1.2 The consultation followed on from the White Paper, Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed issued on 31 January 2017, and sought views on proposals to enhance engagement in democracy, voter eligibility and exercise of votes and how elections can be better organised.
- 1.3 This document sets out a summary of the responses to the consultation exercise at Section 4.¹

¹ Where figures contained in section 4 total more or less than 100%, this is due to rounding.

2. Methodology

2.1. In addition to the principal consultation document, the Welsh Government also produced a youth friendly, easy read and British Sign Language versions of the consultation paper. These were made available on the Welsh Government's website. The Youth Friendly and Easy Read documents were abridged to suit the target audience for these accessible versions.

2.2. The previous Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government also held two round table workshops with the Children's Commissioner for Wales and her young representatives, one in North Wales and one in South Wales.

2.3. The principal consultation document posed 43 questions on electoral reform. A further three questions were included seeking views on any related Welsh language issues or other relevant concerns not specifically addressed within the consultation paper. Due to a technical error these were omitted from the online response form but were available to view in the main PDF consultation document.

2.4 A summary of responses to the youth-friendly and easy-read questions has been incorporated in the analysis of the responses to the principal consultation paper and has been referenced where necessary or where the views of respondents to this consultation differ particularly to that of the main consultation.

3. Overview of Responses

3.1 979 responses were received in total from organisations and a large number of members of the public.

3.2 The number of respondents by type to and consultation document was as below:

Full Version

Number of respondents	775	100%
Member of the public	648	84
County or County borough council	19	3
Town or Community Council	20	3
Political Group / Party	29	4
Representative body, Professional body or Association	25	3
Elected member	18	2
Third sector	10	1
Trades union	2	0
Government agency / other public sector body	2	0
Other	1	0

Easy Read Version

Number of respondents	5	100%
Member of the public	4	80
County or County borough council	0	0
Town or Community Council	0	0
Political Group / Party	0	0
Representative body, Professional body or Association	0	0
Elected member	0	0
Third sector	1	20
Trades union	0	0
Government agency / other public sector body	0	0
Other	0	0

Youth Friendly

Number of respondents	199	100%
Member of the public	5	3
County or County borough council	2	1
Town or Community Council	0	0
Political Group / Party	0	0
Representative body, Professional body or Association	0	0
Elected member	0	0
Third sector	0	0
Trades union	0	0
Government agency / other public sector body	0	0
Other	194	97

British Sign Language

- 3.3. There were no respondents to the British Sign Language version of the consultation.
- 3.4. A list of respondents is included at Section 6. All of those responding to the Youth Friendly version of the consultation have been classed as anonymous respondents, and a number of respondents to the other versions of the consultation chose to remain anonymous and these have been omitted from that list.

4. Analysis of Responses to the Consultation Questions

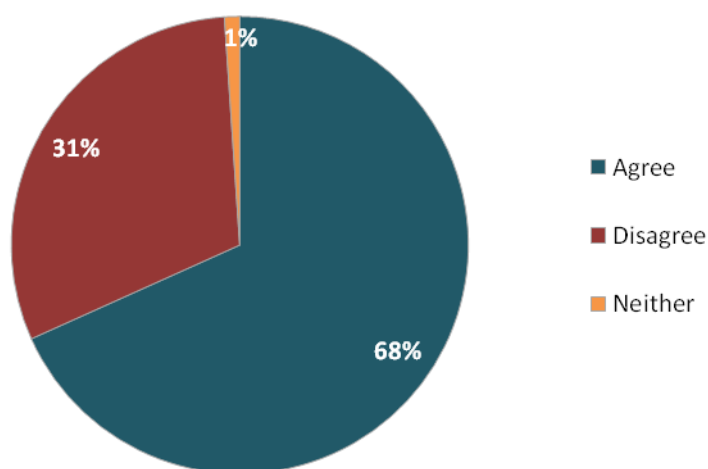
1. Building the Franchise

Votes for 16 and 17 year olds

Q1. Do you agree that the qualifying age for voting in Welsh local government elections should be lowered to 16?

Easy Read (ER) Q1. Do you agree that the age of voting in Welsh local elections should be 16?

Youth Friendly (YF) Q1. Do you think we should lower the voting age for Welsh elections?



There was strong support for the proposal to lower the minimum voting age for local government elections to 16. More than two-thirds of respondents supported the proposal. This was broadly consistent across all categories of respondent, although, at 72%, slightly higher in the 182 responses submitted in response to the youth-friendly version.

A number of common views emerged. Amongst those supportive of the proposal one theme was that it “made sense” in the context of other age-dependent duties, such as paying tax, and the range of rights already enjoyed by young people. Some saw it as a welcome and natural extension of recognising young people’s rights.

Many agreed that lowering the voting age would increase participation of young people in the democratic process and decision-making in matters that affect them. Some also welcomed it as a step towards votes for 16-18-year-olds in *all* elections and one which would build on what they saw as positive experiences in Scotland.

One theme common both to those who agreed and disagreed was young people’s readiness to participate. Some considered a lowering of the qualifying age to be consistent with developments in the school curriculum which would enhance young

people’s understanding. Many responses from those who disagreed with the proposal expressed the view that young people often did not have sufficient maturity and/or experience to understand and engage in the complex nature of politics. Some felt that young people would need first to be more exposed by their schools to coverage of politics and better educated in matters relating to democracy.

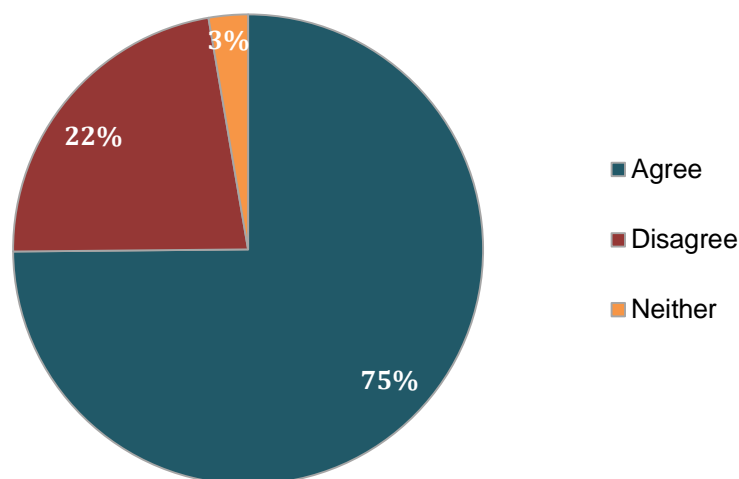
Some felt that lowering the voting age might be considered to be treating ‘children’ as adults before they were ready. A further reservation was that there was no evidence to support lowering the voting age. A small number considered that lessons from the Scottish experience had yet to be digested.

EU Citizens and citizens of other countries

Q2. Should EU citizens who move to Wales once the UK has left the EU continue to acquire the right to vote?

ER Q2. Do you want people from the EU, who come here after we leave the EU, to have a vote?

YF Q2. Do you think EU citizens who move to Wales after we leave the EU should be able to vote in our elections?



Again, there was strong support for this proposal, with three-quarters of respondents to the principal consultation document expressing agreement. Similarly strong support was also seen in response to the youth friendly and easy read documents. Again, there was broad support across the respondent categories.

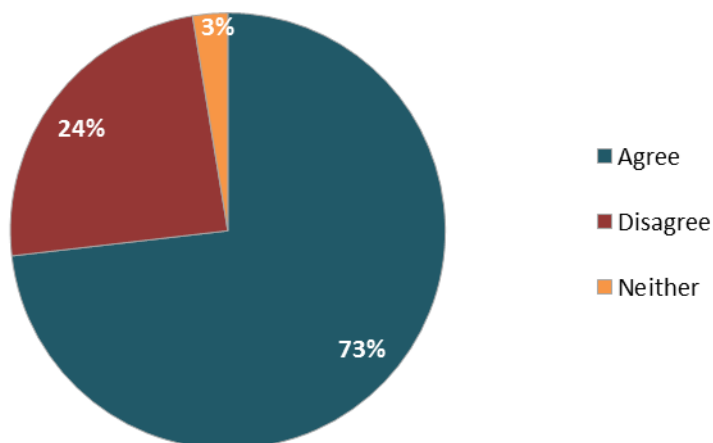
A number of respondents expressed the view that, until the outcome of Brexit negotiations became clearer, it would be difficult to take a firm position. From more definitive responses, there was some common ground between those agreeing and disagreeing with the proposition. This tended to manifest itself in the view that voting should be conditional upon either citizenship or a qualifying residency period. These views ranged from only UK citizens should have a right to vote, to a view that the right to vote should be dependent upon people becoming full residents of the UK or having satisfied a minimum term of residency. A number of people on either side of the debate considered that there should be no taxation without representation or vice versa: “those who don’t pay taxes shouldn’t have the right to

vote” and, “those who pay taxes should have the right to vote for the people who decide how those taxes may be spent” were illustrative comments.

Q3. Should voting rights be extended to all legal residents in Wales, irrespective of their nationality or citizenry?

ER Q3. Do you want everyone who lives in Wales to be able to vote wherever they were born?

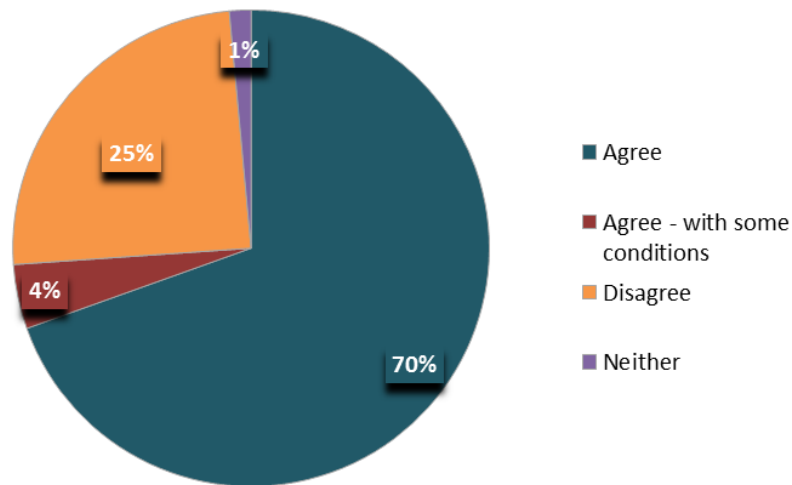
YF Q3. Should everyone legally living here be able to vote?



Agreement and disagreement followed broadly similar patterns to those expressed for question 2. This was also the case across category types, although town or community council responses were far more evenly split, with 56% in agreement, as opposed to 44% who disagreed.

Similar sentiments were expressed, with many comments centring on the transience or otherwise of voters. For example, should students who leave Wales once their studies have concluded be eligible to vote, and/or should it be the case that, "anyone who lives in a given community has an interest in how it is governed irrespective of their origins" and, "a resident is a resident regardless of their nationality"?

Q4. EU and Commonwealth citizens can stand for election to local government in Wales. Should this continue and be extended to all nationalities made eligible to vote?



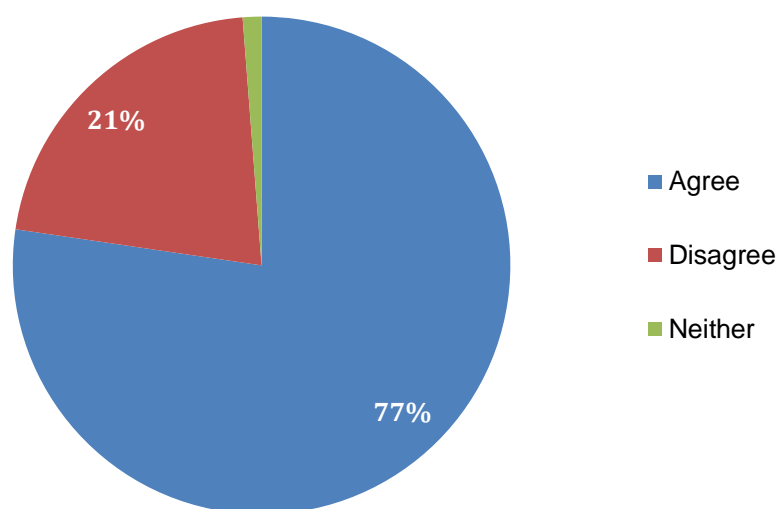
When considered alongside the previous question, there were, as might be expected, broadly similar patterns of agreement and disagreement and associated comments in respect of this matter. Prevailing views about the right to stand for election were frequently linked to citizenship, employment status (i.e. whether an EU/Commonwealth candidate was in work) and length or permanency of residence in Wales.

2. Improving registration

Data-sharing and Automatic Registration

Q5. Should Electoral Registration Officers have a greater range of sources available to them to assist citizens to be added to the register?

YF Q4. Do you think EROs should have more ways to help them add people to the register?



77% of respondents to the principal document agreed with this proposal and there was majority support across the respondent categories.

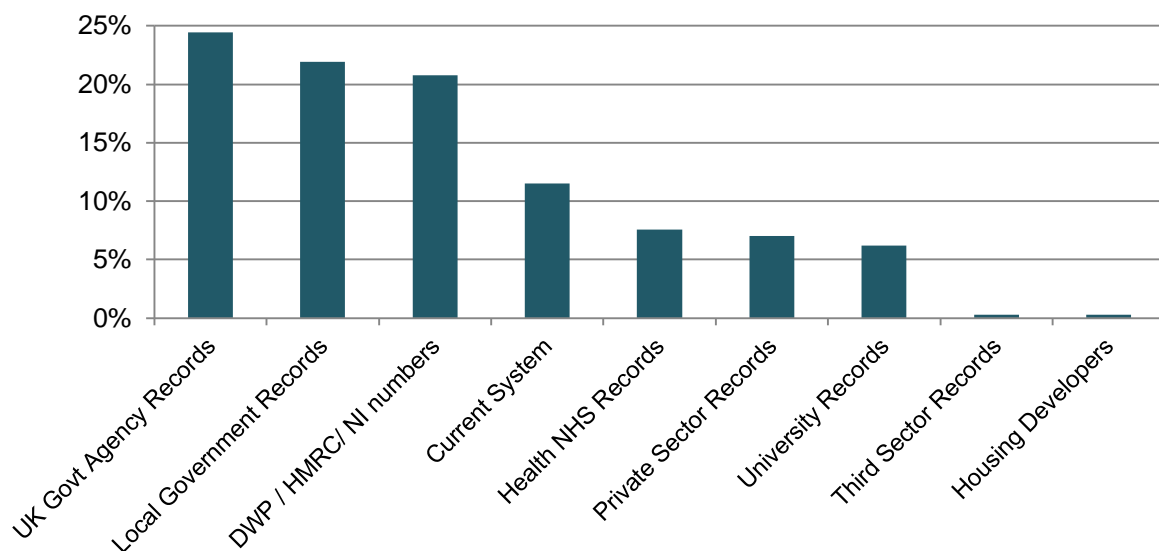
For many of those who agreed, it was thought that Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) should in future have access to a range of other data sources including, for example, national insurance registration, driving license details, and passport information. It was pointed out that EROs already have recourse to council tax and housing benefit information. Together, these sources could be used to help boost registrations on the electoral roll. Advantages seen in increasing the electoral database included a more fully functioning democracy, and reductions to the cost burden achieved by better exploiting electronic opportunities to contact voters.

Typical arguments by those who were not in favour were characterised by comments about infringements of individuals' right to privacy. They argued that it should be a matter of personal choice as to whether or not an individual wished to be on the register. If an individual neither knew how nor was sufficiently interested in adding themselves to the register, then, according to some, perhaps they were not 'fit' to vote.

A counter view was that, "anything that encourages and therefore extends the voter base... has to be a plus for Wales. Apathy has for too long been the problem."

Q6. Which data sources do you think should be used by Electoral Registration Officers?

ER Q4. Do you want offices like benefits to give us your name for the voting register?



Of the 356 responses to the first of 11 open questions, 93% considered that any data sources should be derived either from government data or that held in the public sector. Most prevalent were responses suggesting the use of data held in UK government agency records, local government information and/or via DWP, HMRC and national insurance records. Together, these responses accounted for 57% of the total.

12% supported simply retaining the current system. A further 8% supported accessing data held by the NHS. Similar numbers were in favour of using information held in private sector or university records.

Those who supported the use of data held by government or government agencies often referred to the electoral roll, council tax information, records held by the HMRC or the Welsh Revenue Authority, or information used by the DVLA or DWP. There are specific references within the responses to not using information from privately held data sources.

A contribution from the Electoral Reform Society was that, "we would suggest that NHS data, passport information, university registrations, DVLA applications, public utilities, information from schools (concerning attainers) and welfare information would be useful." They went on to say, "While data protection is obviously a concern we believe that appropriate mechanisms could be put in place to ensure sharing of data is compliant with restrictions."

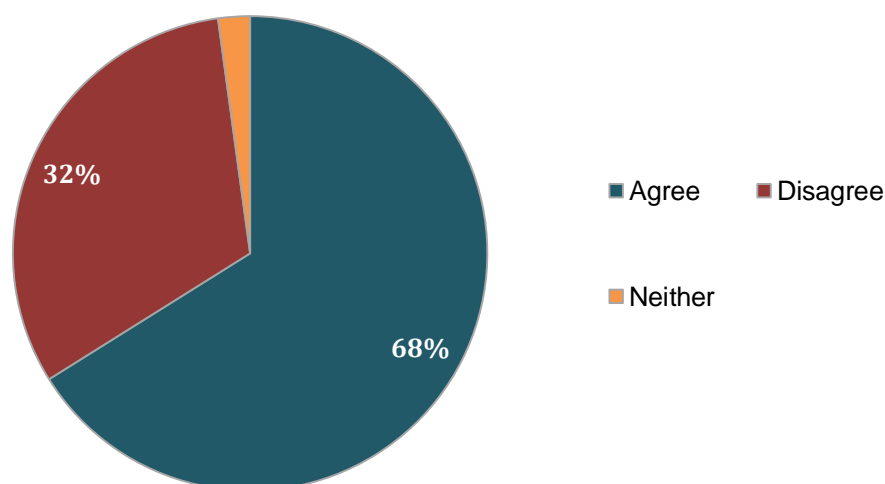
A further comment supported the development of an official website on which voters could verify whether and where they were registered.

A practical consideration expressed was that the use of ever more data sources could lead to errors and potentially to duplication.

Enabling a wider range of Council Officers to assist people to register

Q7. Should a wider range of local authority staff be empowered to assist citizens to obtain registration through access to the local government register and have the ability to amend it?

YF Q5. Do you think local authority staff should be able to help people register?

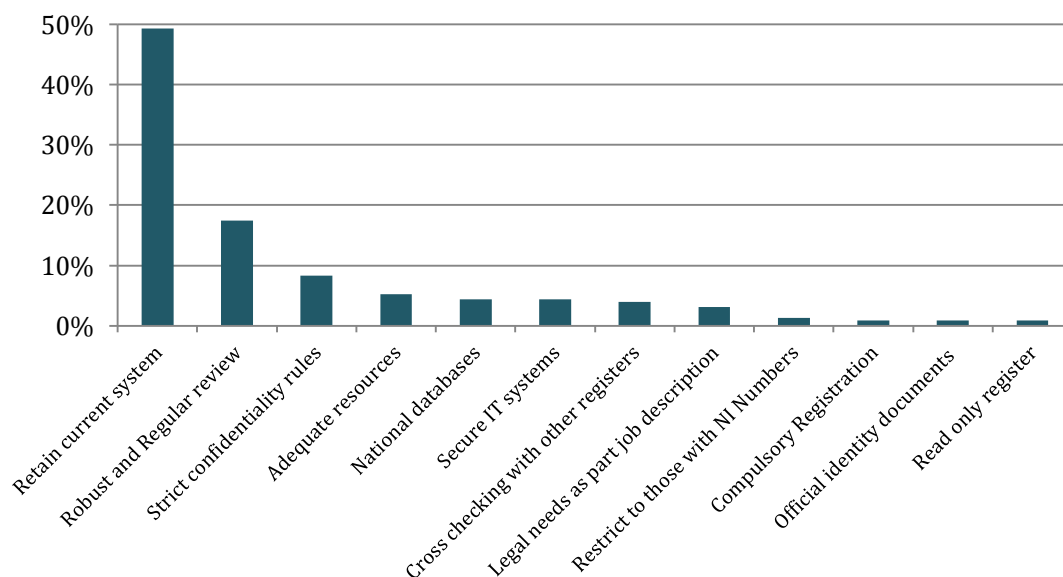


This question drew a range of responses. On the face of it, 68% of respondents to the main consultation document agreed with the question. This figure rose to 85% of those responding to the youth friendly consultation. It was, however, much more balanced when the views of county and county borough councils, particularly, were taken into account. Here, a smaller number (58%) expressed agreement.

Those in support considered there were advantages in terms of the proposal increasing the size of the electoral register and assisting those who may otherwise be prevented or deterred from registering through more 'traditional' means. We note that many of the comments from those who indicated they agreed also expressed concerns and reservations. Some of these were common to those expressed by respondents who disagreed with the proposal. In a number of comments there was anxiety that allowing too many people to edit or access the electoral register could open the system to fraud and/or affect its integrity.

If the responsibility of registering individuals was to rest with a new range of council officials, it was thought that a high level of training would be necessary. A number of respondents, however, considered that the responsibility should continue to rest with the ERO and their specialist team (which would possibly require an increase in resources to deliver against new duties or expectations).

Q8. What controls should be put in place to ensure the Electoral Registration Officer maintains overall control of the register?



This second open question drew a smaller number (229) of responses. That may be linked to levels of general awareness as to the role of EROs and current levels of control over the electoral register.

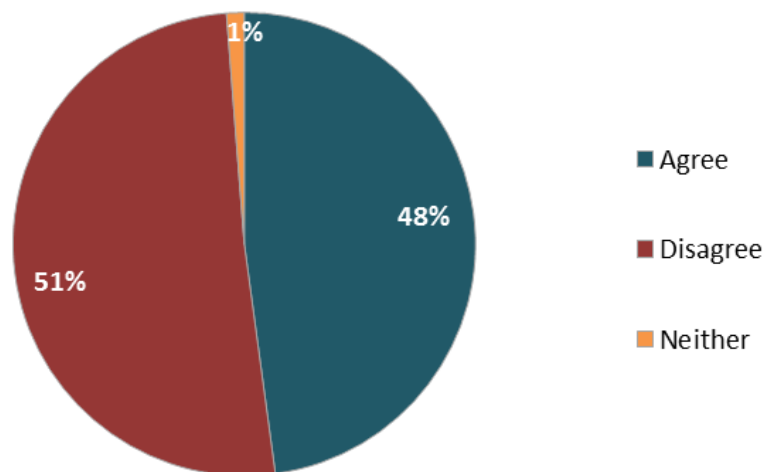
Of the responses, just fewer than 50% were in favour of retaining the current system, often considering that sole control of the register, and oversight of its use, should rest with EROs and their teams. A number thought that any proposed changes to the register should remain provisional until approved by the ERO. Possibly, other parties could advise on suggested additions to, or deletions from, the register, but, again, these should remain merely suggestions and the decision whether or not to implement them should rest with an ERO.

There was significant support for ensuring the accuracy, reliability and use of registers across Wales, which 17% of respondents thought should be subject to regular, robust review. Associated with this view there were also some calls for an office – possibly an Ombudsman - or body to be established, to oversee the work of EROs.

Relaxing rules on individual registration

Q9. Should the individual registration rules be relaxed to allow for block registrations in certain circumstances, protecting the right to vote for populations otherwise at risk of exclusion?

ER Q5. Do you want everyone in a house to register on the same form?



Responses to this question, although including sometimes strongly expressed views, were finely balanced, with a small majority (51%) disagreeing with the proposal. A higher proportion of respondents to the Easy Read version agreed to this proposal with 83% agreeing to 17% disagreeing.

A number of prevalent themes emerged in the responses, some of which were common to those who agreed and disagreed with the proposal. Most frequent amongst these was a concern for the integrity of the registration system. Particularly, there was anxiety that block registration could or would lead to fraud or abuse of the system. Allied to this was a possibility that the proposal could see coercive practices and/or block registration leading to block votes – with groups or, perhaps, heads of household holding undue sway. There was a clear and common view that, were the proposal taken forward, strong safeguards would need to be in place to ensure there was no manipulation of votes and voters. Additionally, some indicated that the circumstances in which block registration should apply should be clear. A small number of respondents were concerned that personal information could be compromised or misused.

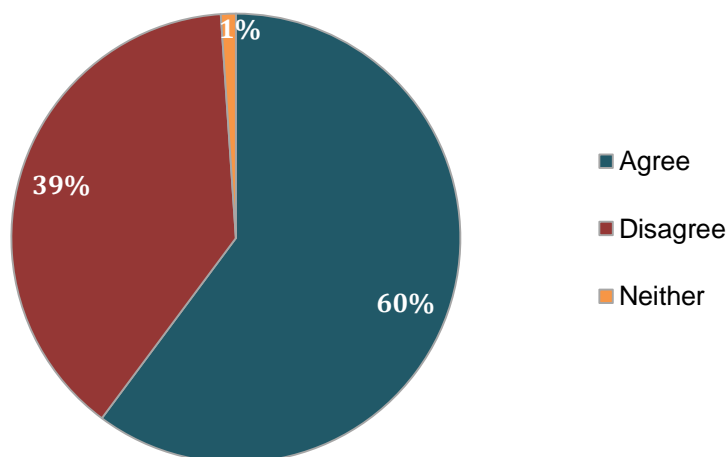
On a technical note, respondents on both sides of the debate expressed views that care would need to be taken to avoid duplication of registrations. A recurrent view was that registration and voting were matters of individual responsibility. Some felt that unless and until voting were mandatory, individuals had a right to choose whether or not to participate.

Those who agreed with the proposal identified possible benefits of enhancing participation in the democratic process across a number of groups. The most referenced groups were students (including those in university, post-16 education and further education institutions) and elderly and/or vulnerable people. This included those in long-term care settings, hospitals and hospices, but also a number of references were made to homeless people. Some support was expressed for block registrations from prisons.

Common to both those agreeing and disagreeing with the question was a view that greater awareness and education were necessary to increase participation.

Targeted registration campaigns

Q10. Should we place a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to consider whether any individual groups within their electoral area should be specifically targeted in registration campaigns?



60% of respondents agreed, with majority agreement across respondent categories and, most markedly, in responses from town and community councils, political groups, representative bodies, elected members, third-party and government agencies.

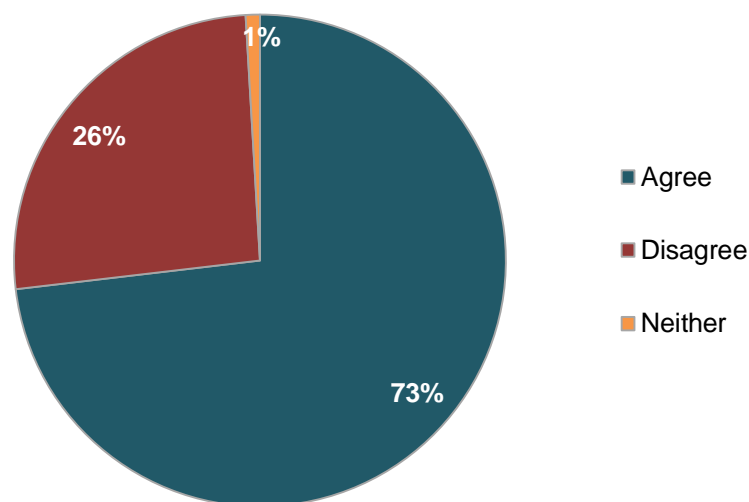
It was recognised that EROs already have a requirement, described as having to, "... take all necessary steps to comply with their duty to maintain the electoral register, and to ensure, as far as is reasonably practical, that all those eligible (and no others) are registered." It was also noted that EROs must have in place local public engagement strategies.

The particular groups most frequently identified by respondents as being appropriate target groups for registration campaigns were: young people, the elderly, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and the socially isolated. A number of responses commented that some people within these groups may need extra assistance to register. A small number commented that it was important to make the funds available to run registration campaigns.

A commonly held view from those who did not support targeting registration was that awareness should be increased across *all groups* and not only in respect of specific target groups. Some thought that real or perceived bias against or in favour of particular groups could be problematic, or a mechanism to skew votes. Others expressed a view, echoed elsewhere in the consultation, that responsibility to register lay with individuals and that some chose not to exercise the duty for a variety of reasons. In that vein, some considered that use of the resources necessary to conduct registration campaigns would be inappropriate or wasteful. A small number suggested it would be better instead to promote citizen responsibility or to make registration a legal requirement, however it is already a statutory requirement to register to vote when invited by the ERO, and those not responding to that invitation to register can be fined.

Identifying people moving into and out of an area

Q11. Should we introduce arrangements so that agencies who are aware of people moving have a duty to inform the Electoral Registration Officers?



73% of the 644 respondents to this question were in broad agreement, although principal reservations, from across the commentary, were expressed in respect of the type of agencies potentially involved.

Again, many recognised that EROs already enjoy access to internal resources, such as Council Tax records, which should support them in discharging their role in maintaining accurate registers. There was broad support for continuing to use existing local authority data, as well as health or housing records. In terms of the latter, however, there was much less support for using information which might be held by private landlords and, more broadly, the private sector generally. These comments often centred either on data security, reliability and privacy, or else on placing what might be disproportionate and costly administrative burdens on those charged with gathering the data, a point also raised in connection with a new duty on public sector agencies.

The Electoral Reform Society (ERS), for example, whilst supportive of the general principle and of, “better mechanisms for agencies to notify EROs of people’s change of addresses,” was less clear that a duty was necessary to achieve this and that more emphasis could instead be placed on cooperation and partnership working. In common with other responses, ERS also considered that this might fall more to public bodies rather than to private businesses, for example, estate agents. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) offered comments in support of using wider data sets, beyond local authority data, including in this information held by public utility services (gas, electricity and water records for example), the DVLA, UCAS and NHS records.

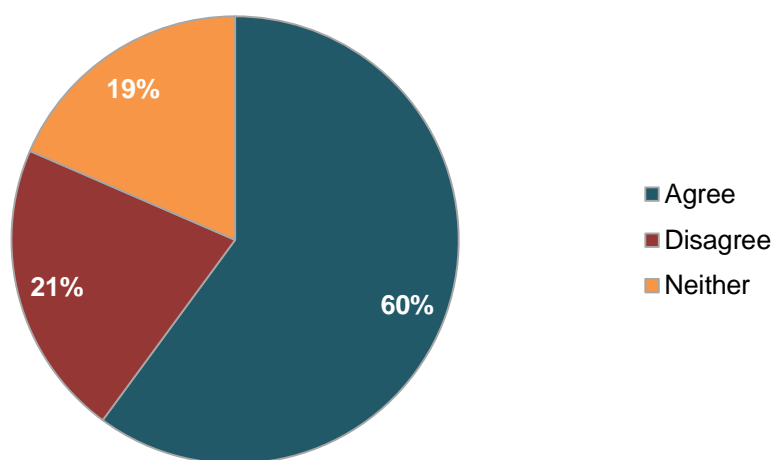
Often, those in support thought that capturing this data would be beneficial for young people in particular, as they may be more likely to move home frequently.

Those who did not support the proposition typically made one or both of two arguments common throughout the consultation: that registration was a matter of personal choice or responsibility; however as previously highlighted it is in fact a statutory duty to register when invited to by the ERO; and great care was necessary to avoid incursions into personal privacy or; that imposing duties to collect and exchange information would be onerous and costly and/or disproportionate to the intended outcome.

Developing an all-Wales electronic register

Q12. What are your views on the development of a single electronic register for Wales?

YF Q6. Do you think we should have a single electronic register for Wales?



Overall, positive responses accounted for 60% of the returns, with 21% rejecting the notion and a further 18% expressing no clear preference. Whilst a majority of members of the public who expressed a view were supportive – by nearly 3:1 – this was less clear-cut when responses from councils were considered. County or County Borough Councils were unfavourable by 2:1, whilst Town or Community Councils were supportive by slightly more than 2:1. A common theme here was that the burden of a system should not outweigh its usefulness.

Overall, many of the responses were split on the same issue: where some saw perceived disadvantages, others perceived advantages to be drawn from developing an electronic register.

Many respondents viewed the prospect of a single electronic register as consistent with developments in technology and were seemingly impatient for systems to keep pace. Typically, the view was that a system would be cost-effective, might lead to greater operational efficiency and effectiveness and enhance participation in democratic processes. There was also a view, on both sides of the debate, that electronic registration would be a forerunner of electronic voting.

The most common theme, however, was the safety of such a system against potential fraud, hacking and to a lesser degree, abuse of personal information. Whilst a large number would not support a single electronic database on that basis, others were favourable provided appropriate technical and security safeguards were in place.

There were some misgivings surrounding the 'track record' of 'big data schemes' and their effectiveness (which contrasts with the view characterised above). Against this, others saw benefits accruing from Wales' relatively small population which meant it should be feasible to implement nationally across Wales. There were, however, conflicting views about whether an electronic database should be prepared at UK, Wales or, most commonly, local level.

A further consideration was that a system should not be biased against those who did not or could not access computers and/or were not 'I.T. literate', although there may have been some confusion here over the intended purpose of the register, as electors would not have direct access to it, only EROs and their staff.

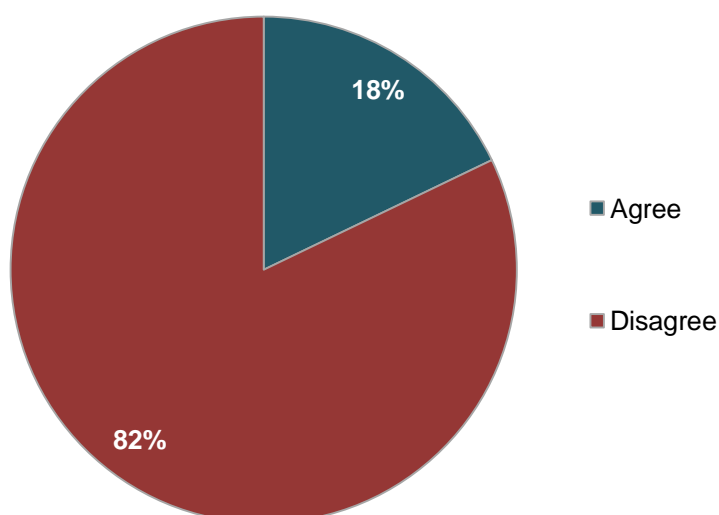
Finally, a sizeable number of respondents felt they had insufficient knowledge or information to form a view at this stage.

3. The voting system

Offering a choice: First Past the Post or Single Transferable Vote

Q13. Do you agree that individual principal councils should be able to choose their voting system?

YF Q7. Do you think each council should be able to choose their voting system?



There were 694 responses to the question concerned with principal councils becoming able to choose the voting system in their elections. Of the responses, 600 were submitted by members of the public.

The question drew generally clear-cut and sometimes robust responses, particularly where people disagreed with the proposal. Overall, 18% agreed with the question and 82% disagreed. Similar levels of support were seen amongst those responding to the youth friendly consultation with 74% disagreeing and 26% in favour.

Whilst there was general disagreement, there were different levels of consensus observed in the various types of respondent. For example, the principle was rejected unanimously by the 18 County or County Borough Council respondents. 82% of responses from members of the public expressed disagreement. There was some discernible, albeit minority, support seen from Town or Community Councils (15 responses) where 1:3 agreed with the question - a pattern similar amongst those responding on behalf of a political group, party representative body, professional body or association (a further 15 responses).

The single most frequent representation was in favour of a single system *across Wales* - or, in some views, across the UK. More than 250 responses included variations on this theme. A significant number of these responses, as well as some others, cited the (to them) disagreeably 'patchwork' nature of permissive systems – i.e. different for different types of election as well as authority areas having different systems one from another. To many this had the potential for confusion among voters, some suggesting this would act as a disincentive to participation.

There was also strong support (100+ comments) for the further development or adoption within a consistent voting system of a variant of proportional representation, most notably the Single Transferable Vote system. Whilst there was some limited support for First Past the Post (FPTP), this was expressed in single digit numbers and was greatly outweighed by other comments explicitly critical of the current FPTP system.

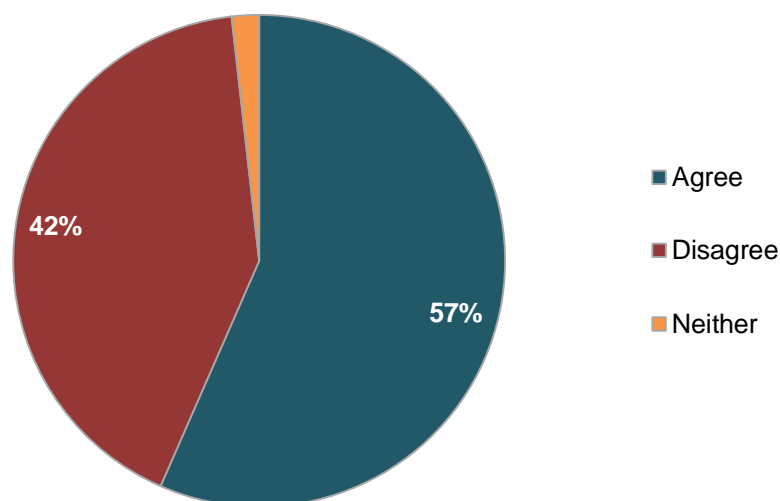
A recurrent comment by those who disagreed with the question was that, if enacted, the process would be open to political self-interest or "gerrymandering". A common observation was that a single voting system should be determined and enforced by the Welsh Government, rather than left to local determination.

Whilst those disagreeing with the question often shared common concerns, support for the proposal was overwhelmingly expressed in a simple "yes" response (95 instances).

The very small number (18) of narrative responses indicating agreement in principle were characterised by different types of response. That said, the most common of these (11 responses) hinged on comments in support of a consistent system, with preference for proportional representation or dissatisfaction with FPTP. A small number of more overtly positive responses cited the possibility of more "innovation and progress", with decisions being made at a more local level, and reflecting the different needs and demographics across parts of Wales. Single figure responses linked the decision to the wider local government reform agenda.

On both sides of the discussion, some saw a need for greater awareness and understanding of the processes involved, as well as a public mandate, rather than one determined by elected members (a handful of responses referred to adoption of the proposal being decided following a referendum).

Q14. Do you agree that a constitutional change such as this should be subject to a two-thirds majority?



Responses were more balanced on this question. Overall, 57% agreed and 42% disagreed. This split largely corresponded with the views of those elected positions.

Naturally, many of the respondents answered in terms of the preceding question and their previous responses. Typically, on both sides, this included references to STV. A large number disagreed with the proposal because they rejected the terms of question 13 and wanted a system that was either STV or FPTP.

The numbers overall, were however much more evenly split than was the case for question 13.

It seems that greater development of proposals is necessary to avoid confusion. There was, for example, a lack of clarity as to who would constitute the decision-making body: was it two-thirds of the National Assembly for Wales, of councils or of the constituent electorate?

Of those expressing general agreement, some felt such a change represented a major decision and, accordingly, a large majority would be appropriate. A small number of respondents indicated that the majority required should be even greater than two-thirds.

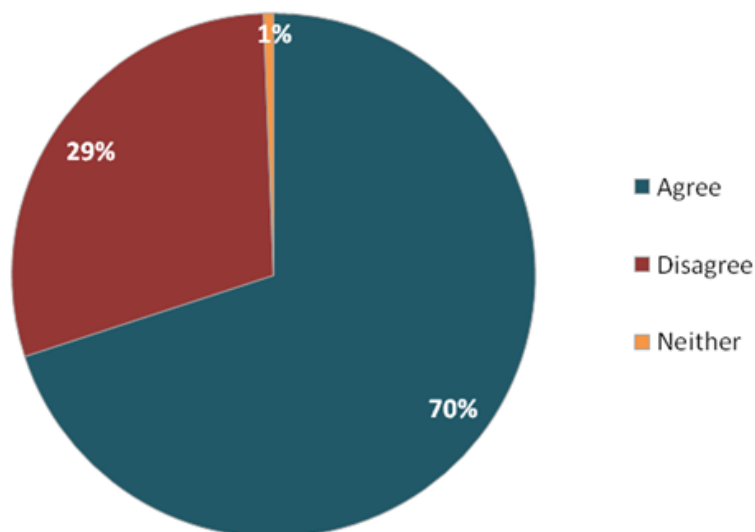
Again, a large number referred to their preference for outright proportional representation, but said that, were it to be permissive, a two-thirds majority would be appropriate. Those who appear to assume the question referred to a two-thirds majority of the electorate had mixed views as to whether this meant the total number of those registered to vote or to the actual turn-out.

Of those disagreeing with the question, about one-in-six respondents felt that a simple majority would suffice.

Five-year terms

Q15. Do you agree that the term of local government in Wales should be set at five years?

YF Q8. Do you think elections should be every five years?



Of the 653 responses to this question, 70% agreed and 29% disagreed. This contrasted with the youth-friendly version, which produced much more evenly-split responses, with 52% in agreement and 48% disagreeing.

Of those who agreed with a five-year term, about 90% were in strong agreement. Views in support tended to centre on the perceived sense - and cost savings – in aligning election terms with those of the National Assembly for Wales and the UK Government. Against this, however, was a concern that bringing election cycles together could lead confusion among voters over the various governing bodies being elected.

Some saw a five-year term as beneficial in enabling administrations to have sufficient time to put in place their plans.

Conversely, a majority of those who disagreed with an extended term felt that the current four-year cycles were appropriate and sufficiently lengthy. A significant number felt that three years would be more satisfactory, with shorter terms meaning that councillors were more accountable to the electorate. People holding this view often made comments about the perceived quality of local councillors and expressed concerns that 'ineffective' councillors or councils could remain in power for even longer periods.

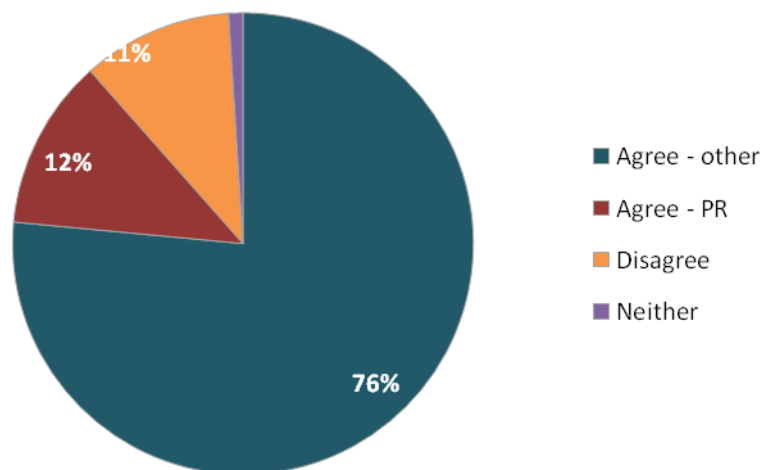
Minority views on both sides of the debate hinged on the view that there should be limits as to the number of terms for which candidates could stand. Additionally, a view was expressed by a few on both sides that there needed to be a mechanism to remove 'ineffective' councillors or councils before the expiry of their full term.

4. The voting process

Q16. Do you agree in principle with the desirability of reforming the voting system to encourage greater participation?

ER Q6. Do we need to try other ways to vote?

YF Q9. Do you think we should change the voting system to get more people to take part?



A very strong majority of responses fully or partly supported this proposition. Just fewer than 90% of those responding to the main consultation document were in agreement, along with 74% of responses from young people.

Of those in agreement, a significant number again referenced a reform which they saw as necessary: move away from FPTP and support a consistent system of proportional representation. There was a view that this was needed to ensure that voters felt the vote was valuable and so would lead to greater participation.

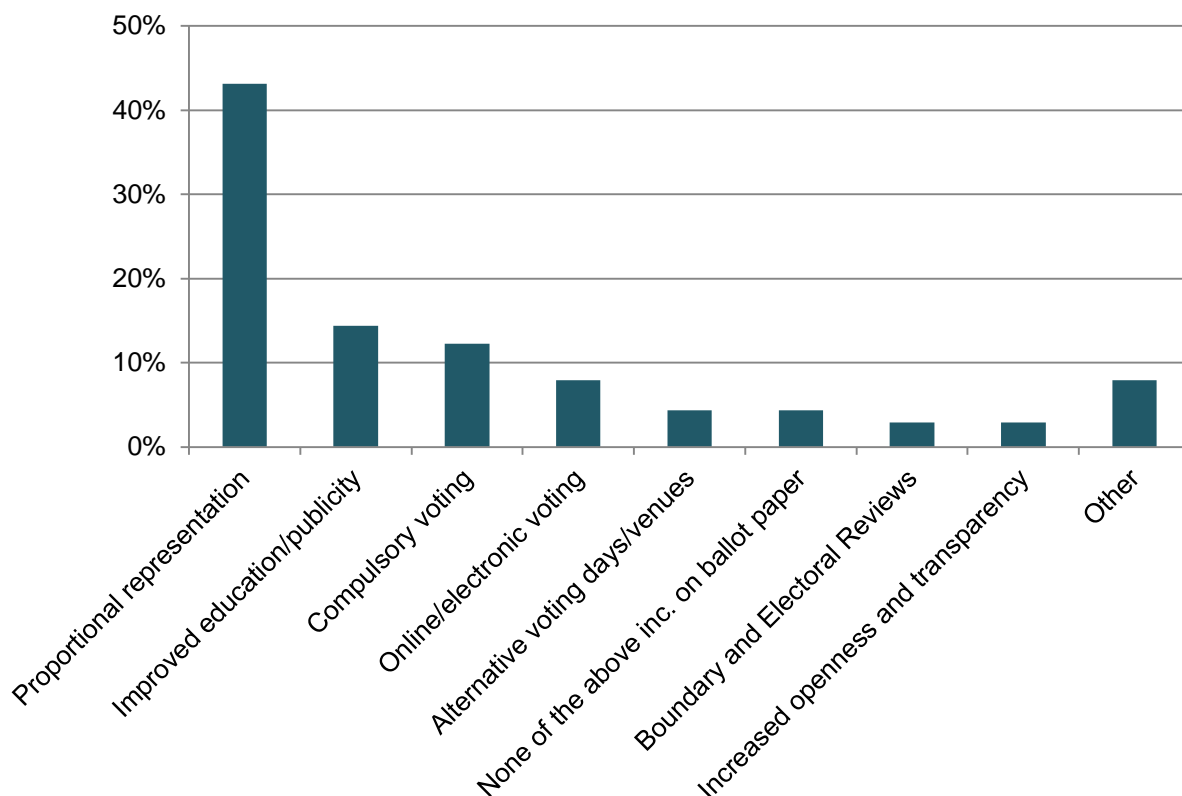
Another, albeit minority, view was that voting should be made compulsory. A small number also mentioned a perceived need to improve accessibility for under-represented groups or areas. In this regard, particularly, a small number also saw advantages in improving digital accessibility. Yet, a small number felt that a digital system could lead to an increased risk of fraud or abuse.

Those against, however, sometimes felt it was already sufficiently easy to vote and that there was no evidence that reform would improve turnout. Associated with this, a minority view was that the cost might outweigh any presumed advantages.

Some respondents who indicated they disagreed with the question replied in terms that it would very much depend on the nature of the reforms proposed.

Q17. Are there other initiatives not covered which might be taken to enable greater participation in elections in Wales?

The fourth of the consultation's eleven 'open' questions, 138 respondents offered comments on ways to enable greater participation in elections. Types of responses are shown in the bar chart below:



As can be seen, the most prevalent responses related to a strong preference, often expressed in similarly strong terms, for a system based on proportional representation, for example STV. Respondents often held that FPTP was or could be a deterrent to people voting in, or standing for, elections. A number felt that FPTP was 'crude', but also outmoded as it was predicated on a system in which there had been two large parties, rather than what they saw as a currently more diverse range of political options. The view here was often that, were seats more 'obviously' related to votes cast across the ballot, more people would be prepared to vote. This is a sentiment expressed across the consultation.

Other key themes were improving voter awareness or education through a range of means, including teaching at schools and colleges, a more developed understanding of 'citizenship' (some referred to this being particularly beneficial for students and ethnic minorities) and by political parties further developing their campaign information.

A significant proportion of the responses also alluded to greater participation being achieved through a move to compulsory voting.

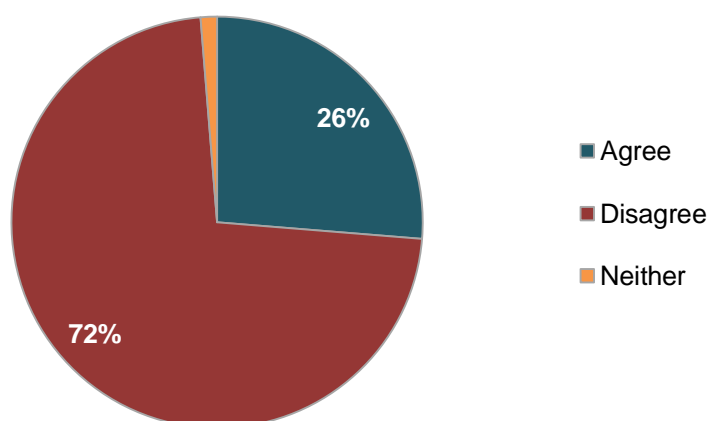
Together, the types of responses above accounted for nearly 70% of all comments. Of the other typical responses, the perceived benefits of electronic voting were again discussed in the context of increasing voter participation.

All-postal voting

Q18. Should councils be able to choose to use all-postal voting at council elections?

ER Q7. Do you want to post your vote for council elections?

YF Q10. Do you think councils should be able to choose to use all-postal voting for their elections?



72% of the 700 responses on the subject of all-postal voting disagreed that councils should be permitted to choose all-postal voting in council elections. Again, a similar response was seen in response to the youth friendly question with 64% disagreeing with all-postal voting. However 67% of easy read respondents were in favour of postal voting.

In the range of comments submitted, two key features were prominent: security and voter choice. The most frequent comment was that postal voting was perceived as being more open to fraud, coercion and subject, according to a smaller number of responses, to being lost in the system or misplaced. A number of strongly-worded representations were made in this regard.

A similarly large number of comments were made in support of voter choice. Whilst some were more relaxed about postal voting, they frequently saw it as only one of the options which should be open to voters. A significant number of comments referred to the enjoyment or sense of civic engagement voters had from going to a polling station to cast their vote. Allied to this, a number of comments were made in support of electronic voting, seen as more suitable for modern choices and younger people.

A smaller number of comments expressed concerns that moving to a single form of voting could be counter-productive as limiting choice could lead to fewer people participating in the democratic process. A further comment made by a small number was that voting methods should be a matter of all-Wales consistency.

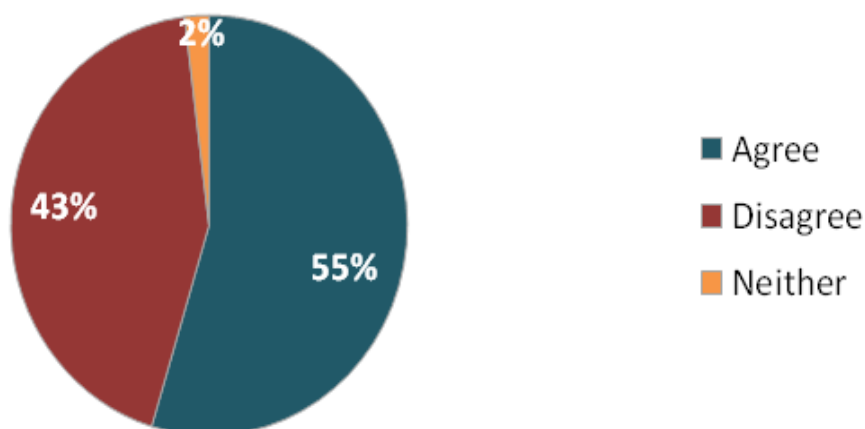
Just over a quarter of respondents agreed with the question. Of those providing comments, a small number offered outright support, for example believing that there were cost-savings to be had by moving to an all-postal system, or that it would help address accessibility issues. Others saw the system as a step towards their preference for digital voting. One response considered that the evidence case for greater voting numbers in community or

town council elections had been made (although it is notable that only one of 14 town or community councils and four of 14 county or county borough council responses agreed with Q.18).

More caveated responses, would support the move were specific provisions met. For example, anticipating question 19, a number would agree subject to the successful conclusion of a pilot and evaluation. More commonly, support would be contingent on any system being made secure against manipulation or error, particularly if personal identifiers were removed as part of a move to all-postal voting. Similar numbers would support a move if associated cost-savings or administrative ease, could be demonstrated.

Small numbers considered that, whichever system was adopted, it should be consistent across Wales or, if that were not the case, clear communications would be necessary to minimise the potential for mixed messages and confusing voters.

Q19. Should it be subject to pilot exercises first?



Respondents were more split on the question of whether any move to all-postal voting should first be subject to a pilot. Of the 609 responses, 55% agreed that the pilot exercise should first be taken forward with 43% disagreeing.

Of those who disagreed, a large number responded in terms of not wishing to see all-postal voting at all, rather than disagreeing that such a development should first be piloted.

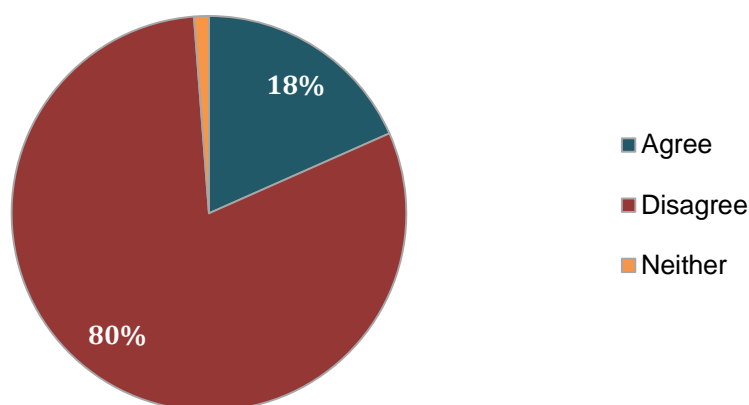
Of those in support of pilot exercises, including those who opposed all-postal voting, many considered that, were it to be introduced, all-post voting should first be subject to pilot exercises. A broad view was that any significant change to voting should be fully tested in the first instance and that this should be the default position. A pilot process could, according to some respondents, potentially provide evidence about how changes to the present process can best be implemented to meet voter needs. Piloting should iron out issues at an early stage, thereby minimising numbers of disaffected users as a later point.

Others held that pilots would be costly, it would not be possible to extrapolate results and

outcomes from one authority to another and that it would be potentially confusing for voters.

A further point made against the introduction of pilot exercises was that they were unnecessary as it had been possible to draw on existing evidence supporting the effectiveness of all postal-voting.

Q20. Should councils be able to operate all-postal voting in an individual ward or a number of wards within a council area?



On the associated question of whether councils should be permitted to run all-postal voting in a particular ward or wards within their area, 80% of respondents disagreed.

Fewer comments were made in respect of this question and those that were often echoed the views expressed in question 18. Most common amongst the comments rejecting this notion was that there should be a universal system, whether applied on an all-Wales basis or across all wards in council area. A small number of respondents thought postal voting should be scrapped altogether or else only available to those physically unable to access a polling station. Again, concerns about fraud were raised, more so, however, in terms of the perceived potential for political manipulation, with parties thought likely to choose a system which better suited their political, rather than democratic, aims. A small number questioned which criteria would be applied to determine whether a ward was to be all-postal. Further, some respondents thought that an inconsistently-applied system would lead to confusion.

As with question 18, the issues of voter choice were raised: that a decision to treat wards differently should rest with the electorate rather than with a council. Again, there was support for the principle that voters should be able to choose the form of voting (postal, in-person or, for some respondents, electronically) best suited to their needs or preferences.

A small number of those who indicated their agreement provided supporting comments. The highest number of these, seven, recognised a possible benefit, particularly in rural or isolated communities (indeed, one response referred to a polling district comprising only seven electors). There was some support for taking forward the proposal on a trial or pilot basis to test the effect on voter participation. The other recurring comment was that residents of wards affected should be able to consent to or reject a proposal to adopt or trial this method of voting.

Electronic voting & Remote voting

Q21. Should electronic voting be enabled at local elections?

ER Q8. Do you want to vote using our computer?

YF Q11. Do you think electronic voting should be available?

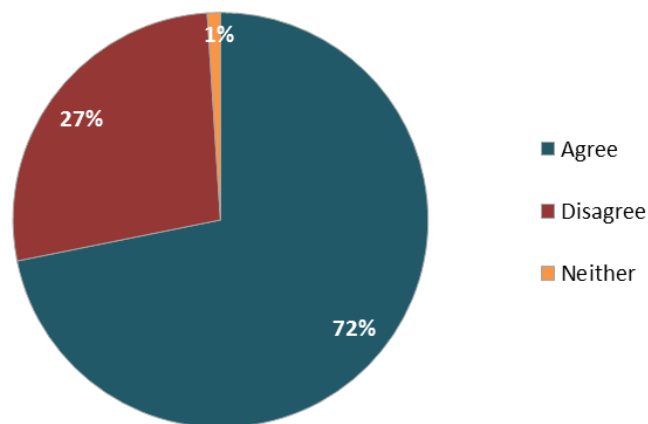
Q22. Should remote voting be enabled at local elections?

ER Q9. Do you want to vote using your own computer or Smartphone?

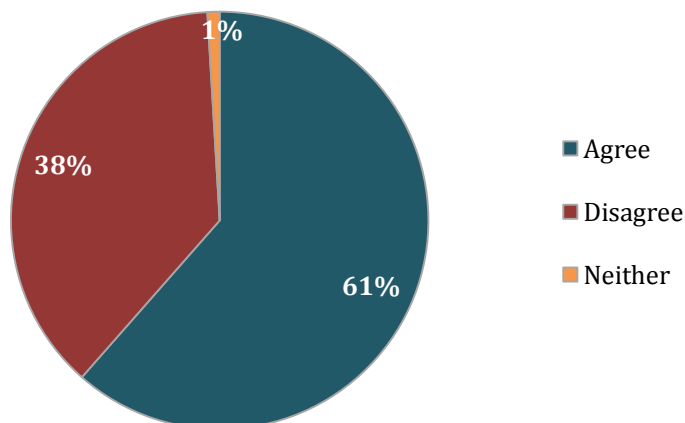
YF Q12. Do you think remote voting should be available at local elections?

There was some confusion in the responses between questions 21 and 22. The comments from many of the responses to both questions suggested that respondents had confused the issue of electronic voting equipment at a polling station with remote electronic voting from any other location, such as through a smart phone or computer. For that reason the response to both questions is considered together.

Question 21:



Question 22:



Overall there was support for both electronic and remote voting, with 72% in favour of electronic voting and 61% in favour of remote voting. The comments received both for and against the proposals were very similar for both questions. Respondents of the youth friendly version of the consultation expressed a similar level of support, with 71% in favour of electronic voting and 74% in favour of remote voting.

Those in support of the proposals felt that this would modernise elections and increase participation, particularly amongst young people. Whilst they acknowledged the initial cost outlay for these systems, some respondents also noted how the use of electronic technology could save authorities money in the long term and lead to savings in the number of polling places that would need to be provided and on printing costs.

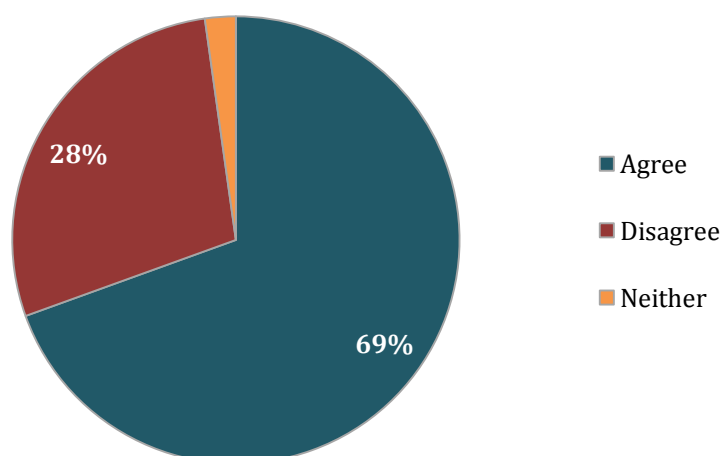
It was also noted how electronic and remote methods of voting would go hand in hand with electronic counting, speeding up the count process, particularly if proportional representation was introduced.

Those in support of electronic and remote voting did have some concerns however, and noted that they were in favour subject to reassurances regarding the safety, security and robustness of the system and there being a clear business case to justify the expenditure. Some respondents noted that any electronic or remote system should first be subject to a pilot scheme.

Safety and security was the main concern amongst those not supporting electronic or remote voting. There were concerns expressed over the robustness of the voting systems and their resilience to hacking and other security threats which might call in to question the integrity of the vote. Others felt that reliability was a concern as there would need to be a reliable IT infrastructure in place to host these systems, and that would place a burden on local authorities.

Electronic counting

Q23. Should electronic counting be introduced for local elections in Wales?



69% of the 675 responses to this question agreed, albeit about a quarter of these with some caveats. 28% of respondents to the main consultation document disagreed with the proposal.

There were a range of views in support of electronic counting. Typically, it is considered that moves to bring the system up-to-date were consistent with other changes, and particularly with those that EROs and administrators have absorbed over the last decade. One response was that it was, "anarchic that results are not declared sooner."

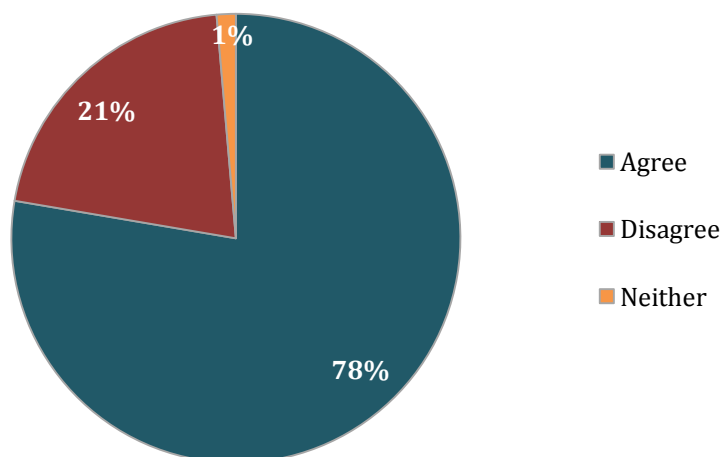
A new system, coupled with electronic voting, would need to be reliable and robust and probably subject to piloting in the first instance (and possibly run alongside a manual system). A common view was that safeguards would need to be ensured. For example, manual counting should be triggered or requested where a vote was particularly close.

Of those who disagreed, a view was that IT systems were costly to develop and maintain. Some were of the view that there were connectivity and security issues related to IT. Others held that an electronic system should not replace people, who are better placed to make a judgement when needed. Counting by hand, in the view of one respondent, was a tried and tested method which works well. Another respondent, however, observed that, in their opinion, electronic counting was working well in Scotland.

Mobile polling stations

Q24. Should mobile polling stations be enabled at local elections?

YF Q13. Do you think mobile polling stations should be available?



There was strong support for this proposition with 78% of the 654 respondents in favour. This figure was exceeded in the youth-friendly exercise, in response to which 84% supported the proposal.

Key advantages seen by those who agreed tended to centre on issues around access in rural areas and for those – particularly elderly people - for whom actually getting to the polling station might be difficult. For working people, there could be a benefit, if clearly communicated, in terms of flexibility to vote during hours and in places consistent with their work arrangements. Mobile polling stations might also diminish the impact on schools,

which are often used as polling stations, by reducing the need to lose a school day. Some agreed with the general proposition, but also saw a need for such a move to be piloted first.

Others would welcome the move, provided it was linked to electronic voting.

Amongst those who disagreed, a view was that increasing the number of polling stations would be unnecessary if electronic voting and increased postal voting were in place.

Many considered the issue of cost and whether the mobile stations would be at the expense of existing polling stations. Some considered that there are already enough polling stations and that the system was working well. A small number remarked that voting amongst the elderly is already relatively high and this did not suggest access issues.

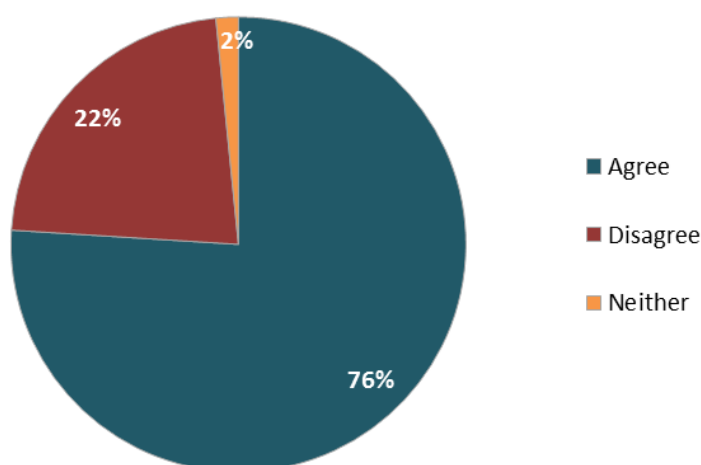
On both sides of the discussion respondents were concerned that any system had to be secure against potential fraud or abuse and that costs had to be outweighed by the benefits (although there are mixed views as to whether this would be the case and demand was sufficient).

Voting at places other than polling places

Q25. Should we enable returning officers to make use of polling places in addition to fixed polling stations?

ER Q10. Do you want to use other places as a polling station to vote?

YF Q14. Do you think we should have these as polling places as well as fixed polling stations?



A similar pattern was seen here with 76% of respondents to the main document agreeing and 80% in the youth-friendly version and, as expected, the arguments were also broadly similar to those for the preceding question.

For those who supported the proposition, views often centred on perceived greater participation, particularly for elderly and/or infirm people, as well as for young people. In terms of the latter, it was thought by some that the proposal would sit particularly well with

the intention to lower the voting age. In the light of that, there could be the potential use as polling stations of schools, colleges, youth centres and other community facilities. Again, some thought there were particular advantages for those in rural areas.

Caveats, on both sides, were noted in terms of the perceived necessity for security and protection against fraud. For example, one view was that returning officers should be visible at stations in order to ‘validate’ the process.

Those against the proposal, often thought securing a more joined-up system involved unnecessary cost and risk. Some thought that voting would be done in much more public places and, perhaps, the unique role and character of the polling station would be diminished.

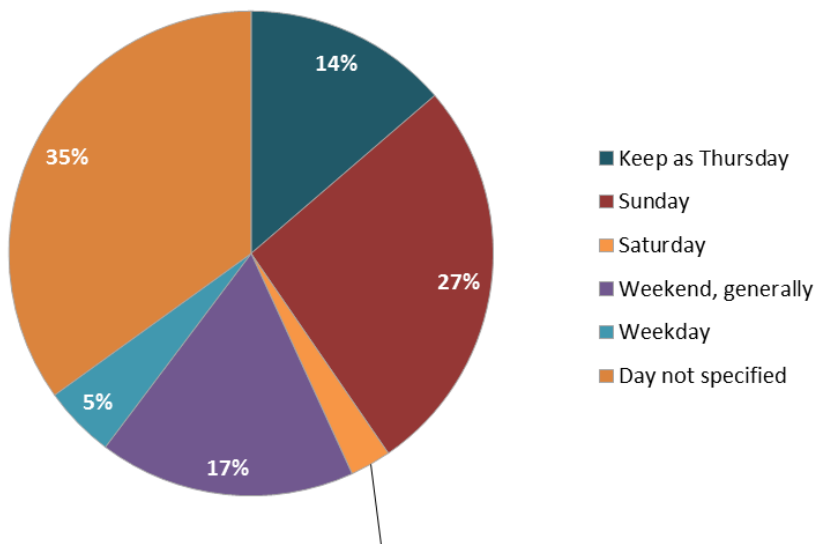
Some considered there was limited supporting evidence for such polling places and they thought that previous pilots in this area had not led to significantly enhanced voting numbers.

There was a view common to both those in agreement and disagreement that there would need to be a thorough examination of cost.

Voting on different days and on more than one day

Q26. Should we enable local elections to be held on more than one day and on days other than a Thursday?

YF Q15. Should local elections be held on more than one day and on days other than a Thursday?



673 responses were received in response to this two-part question. 63% of respondents to the general document and 65% to the youth friendly version indicated they agreed. More comments were made in relation to the issue of holding elections on days other than

Thursdays than to whether it was advantageous to stage elections over more than one single day.

Of those who provided additional comments a large majority (86% of 146 responses) supported considering days other than Thursdays.

Approximately half thought that elections could or should be held during the weekend, with 27% proposing Sundays. Support was often based on an assumption that more flexibility could increase participation levels, some drawing on international evidence apparently confirming the effectiveness, in turn of turnout, of elections held on Sundays. Others, however, considered that the evidence needed to be developed, through pilots, to establish the likely impact in Wales and to determine which days worked best. Pilots would also help understand how or whether voting at weekends affected commuters (who perhaps were more likely to vote on their way to work).

On a practical note, there were a number of comments that weekend voting would mean schools, often used as voting stations at present, would not need to close were elections held at weekends.

Those who did not support moving away from the current convention of Thursday voting pointed to the practice being well-established and questioned the value of changing something which appeared to work well. High levels of turnout for the recent referendum on membership of the European Union were cited as an example in one commentary. Some questioned whether there was currently evidence underpinning the likelihood of a change further increasing turnout.

On a practical front, a small number noted that, whilst schools might be less affected by weekend voting, there could be other cost implications if places of worship were not available at weekends. Other costs could result from weekend payments to officials.

On the matter of holding elections over periods of more than a single day, more than a quarter of responses were supportive, with a smaller proportion (22 explicit responses) against the idea. Some supporting comments referred to higher relative turnout in countries which had adopted voting over multiple days; one suggested moving to that system would be the biggest factor in increasing turnout.

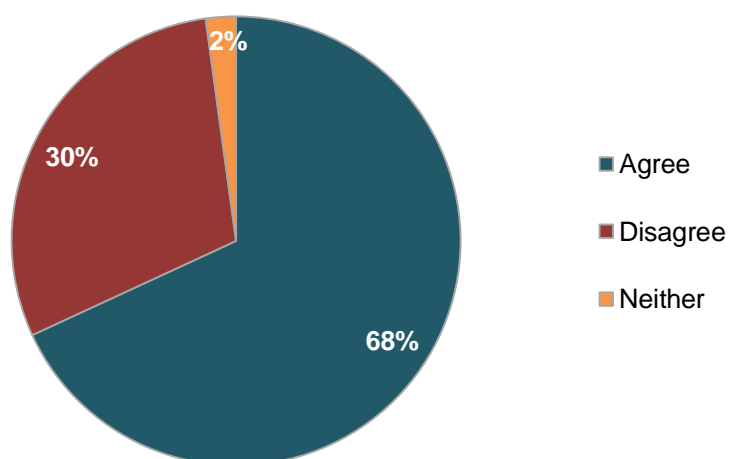
Those who did not favour change saw little supporting evidence, but pointed to perceived additional costs involved in “dragging out” the process, whilst losing the focus implicit in voting on a single day.

Another point, made in response to a number of the consultation questions was that this matter needed to be considered alongside moves towards electronic voting.

Simpler postal voting procedures

Q27. Should consideration be given to simplifying postal voting procedures and literature?

Q28. How do you think the process could be simplified?

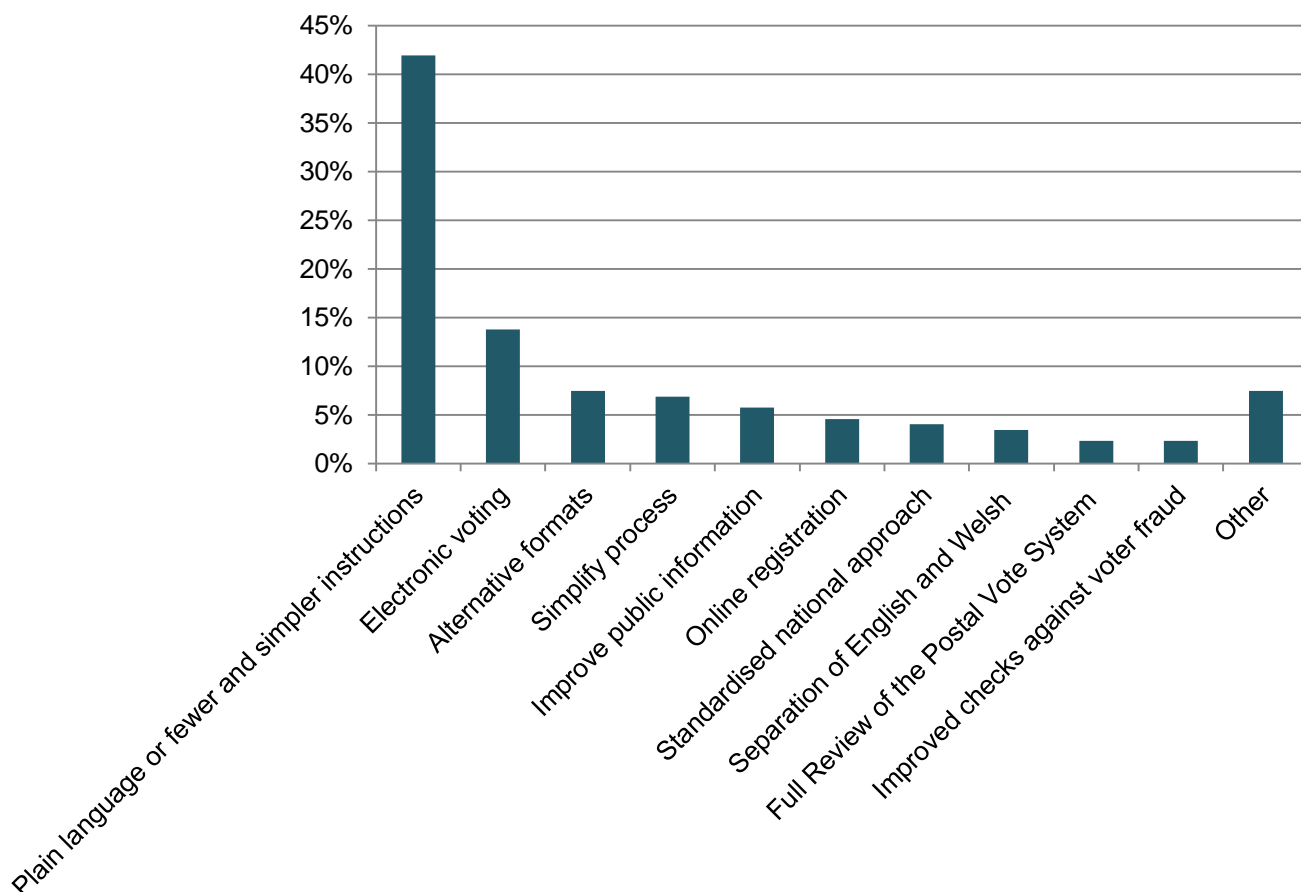


Responses to these two associated questions are considered here in one summary. 646 responses were received to the initial question, with roughly a quarter, 155, going on to offer suggestions as to how processes could be simplified.

68% of respondents to question 28 agreed that there should be further consideration of simplifying voting procedures and literatures. A general point in support was the simpler the guidance the better, although many felt unable to provide further detail as they themselves had had little or no experience of postal voting.

Simplicity was seen as playing a key role in encouraging participation. There was some feeling that the current instructions, including the “signing-up process” can be hard to understand, particularly for those with low levels of literacy in English and/or Welsh and that this could act as a barrier to engagement. Processes, including putting the ‘right’ forms in the ‘right’ envelopes could be confusing, leading to error and adding to workloads of those sorting ballot papers.

Simplicity was also a key theme in question 28: by far, the single most frequent type of response was that plain language and simple instructions were necessary. Documents should not be too long. Reading complicated and inconsistent literature and, to a lesser extent, following processes (as in different parts of Wales) were viewed as time-consuming and potentially confusing. A small number also suggested that different formats should be available to cater for those with a range of needs.



Of the 30% who disagreed with the initial question, most considered that the process, particularly, was already sufficiently simple. A key concern, common to both those who agreed and disagreed with question 27, was that it was highly important to reduce or safeguard against the potential for fraud or other issues affecting the integrity of the poll.

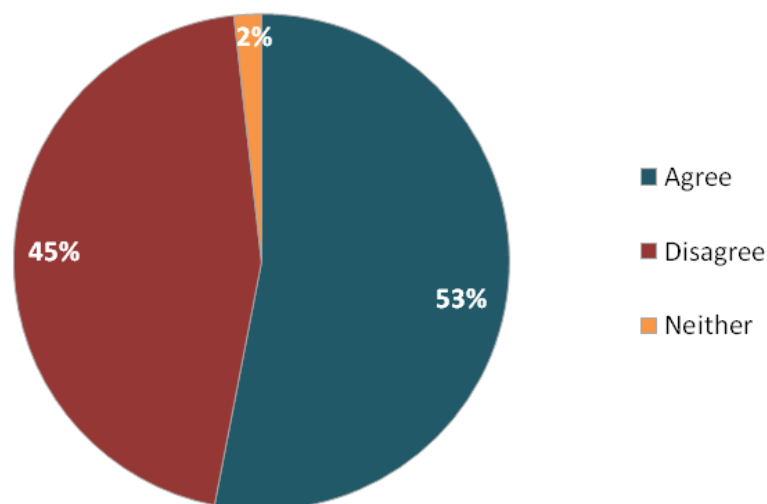
In common with other questions, a small number considered that any changes should first be tested at a pilot stage, a small number feeling a system review was necessary.

Finally, a number of respondents made the point that issues around postal voting would be redundant, or at least less of an issue, were electronic voting to be introduced.

Presenting ID at a polling station

Q29. Should electors attending a polling station be required to produce ID before they are allowed to vote? If so, what types of identification should be accepted?

YF Q16. Should people have to show ID before they can vote?



Overall, agreement and disagreement were finely balanced when respondents considered whether there should be a requirement for would-be voters to first produce identification. 53% of the 673 responses to the principal consultation document expressed support for the principle. This contrasts with the youth friendly exercise; however, where the question was marginally rejected (51% disagreed).

Many of the comments, on either side, can be characterised as concerned either with enhanced security against fraud and abuse or with issues of practicality and ensuring access and turnout are not diminished as a result of having to produce identification.

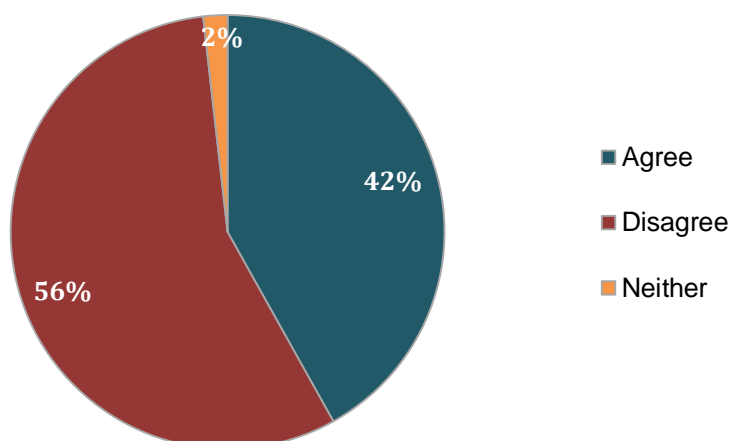
Many who agreed did so on the basis that a requirement would add to the integrity and security of voting and reducing fraud. For some, there would not be a major issue as people were used to being asked to show identification to confirm their identity in a number of situations. Typically, respondents in this camp thought photographic ID was necessary. The single most frequently cited types of identification that could be used were passports and driving licences.

A number of comments, however, made or drew on assertions that there was currently little evidence of voter fraud in Wales and so an identification requirement – depending on what type of documentation was necessary - seemed unnecessary. Some suggested it would also be potentially damaging. This might be particularly so as people did not always have access, for example, to passports and/or driving licences. If the voting age were lowered to 16, it could be challenging for young voters to provide ID deemed appropriate. Fewer but similar comments were also made in terms of BAME access to identification, and more generally, to poorer people who it was thought often did not hold passports or driving licences.

Practical ways to overcome the potential issue were suggested. A number mentioned the use of voter identification cards and experiences with these in Northern Ireland, with a small number highlighting the perceived benefits of a national identity card. For a minority of respondents, any requirement should be 'light touch', with acceptable ID including utility bills, transport passes or student union cards. Other types of identification deemed appropriate were bank or credit card statements and a National Insurance number.

In terms of the evidence base, as well as references to Northern Ireland, some comments noted that voter identification pilots would take place in England this spring and the outcomes should be taken into account.

Q30. Do the advantages of requiring ID outweigh the risk of deterring voters?



It appears that the wording of this question might have been insufficiently clear: a large number of respondents purporting to agree or disagree made comments seemingly at variance with that position.

Whilst a number of responses centred on a perceived need to take measures to prevent electoral fraud, a larger number of those apparently on either side of the discussion made the point that there is currently little evidence of a widespread fraud problem in Wales. A common position was that producing identification might be a deterrent to participation, particularly for low income voters, or would-be voters, and that an ID requirement was disproportionate to an unproven or else very minor problem.

Comments, particularly from members of the public, also suggested they did not feel equipped to answer the question and that evidence or research was needed to support a final position. A small number suggested piloting and, in that regard, there were two references to learning from evaluation of the voter identification pilots being run (at UK level) this year.

A common theme was that, if people wished to vote, producing ID was not a significant barrier for those “with nothing to hide”, not least as it was a common expectation which people were used to in a number of environments (for example, cashing a cheque at a Post Office). The view here was that most people already possessed forms of identification. A small number also suggested it would not be a problem at all were people required to carry national identification cards.

The counterpoint was that many people did *not* hold appropriate ID and they should not be disadvantaged by having to acquire it, particularly if, as with a passport, there was a cost

attached. Typically, this view, expressed by those both agreeing and disagreeing with the question, held that any required ID should be accessible and affordable.

5. Standing for election

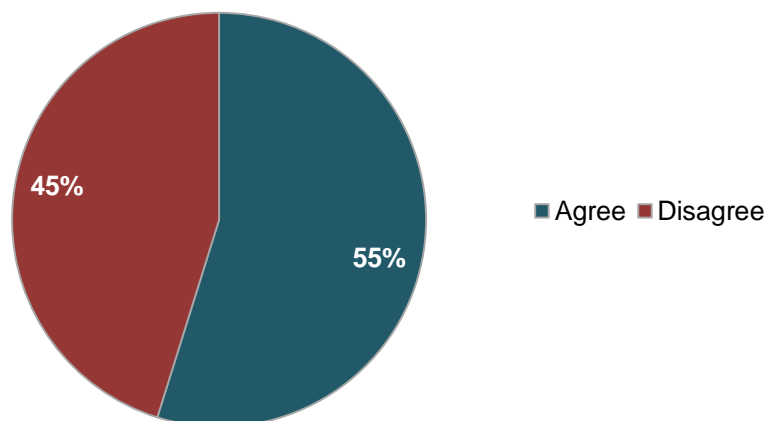
Removing need to publish candidate's postal address

Q31. Do you agree that it should no longer be necessary to publish a candidate's home address in election literature, including anything published electronically?

[54/46]

ER Q11. Do you think we can take the home address off everything for a person who is standing for election?

YF Q17. Do you think we should stop publishing a candidate's home address?



Numbers in agreement and disagreement with this proposal were more balanced. Overall, 55% were in favour, but this included particularly strong views from political parties or groups (75% in favour) and trade unions (100%). 65% of those responding to the young people version supported the proposal.

Many of the responses in favour noted that this provision is already in place for parliamentary candidates and that there should be replicated in local government elections.

A common view was that whilst it might not be necessary to provide precise addresses there should still be away for the electorate to identify whether a candidate was living in the area where they were standing. In line with this, 59 of those have agreed with the proposal and 15 who disagreed said that they would only support the removal of the current requirement if some other residential information was provided, demonstrating a candidate's residential connection to the area. In practical terms, it was suggested that this could include publication of the candidate's home ward, home postcode code, or another appropriate contact address such as the constituency office (as is the case for parliamentary candidates). Some suggested that an email address would be sufficient in place of a home address.

There were clear concerns, including from those who had previously been candidates, about the perceived vulnerability of those making their address details public. A new system would need to balance the need for transparency (a major feature on both sides of the discussion) with candidate safety. One associated issue raised was that there should instead be a specific offence created to deal with those who intimidate candidates. Others also commented, however, that removing the requirement would have little practical benefit as individuals can be traced by other means including internet searches or social media.

Those who disagreed with the proposition often responded that it was an important part of an elected member's role to be contactable by the people they seek to represent, and that access should extend to the home address. A link was drawn between accessibility and accountability; and a view that if you wish to enter public life you should not expect to be overprotective of your right to privacy.

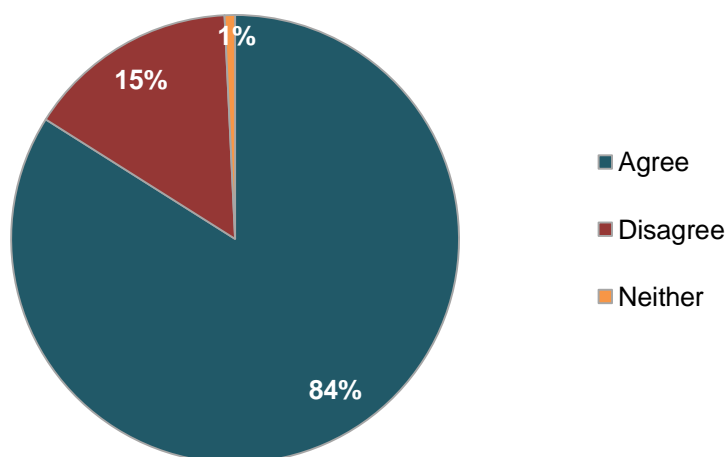
There were also concerns expressed over the perceived 'parachuting in' of candidates to seats with which they had no real or meaningful connection.

On-line publication of candidate's statement

Q32. Do you agree that each candidate should be required to provide a personal statement for inclusion on a website provided by the authority to whom they are seeking election?

ER Q12. Do you think each candidate needs to write down what they believe in and what they want to happen? Then all of this put on 1 website?

YF Q18. Do you think each candidate should have to give a personal statement?



There was strong support for this proposal, both in the main document (84%) and even more so in response to the youth friendly version (89%). A key reason cited in support was that such a move would improve democracy and voters' understanding of what a candidate stood for. A small number remarked that candidates, if elected, could be readily held to

account against their stated position.

Some respondents noted that the practice of publishing candidate personal statements was already established at police and crime commissioner elections (although it was questioned whether this was particularly beneficial to the democratic process).

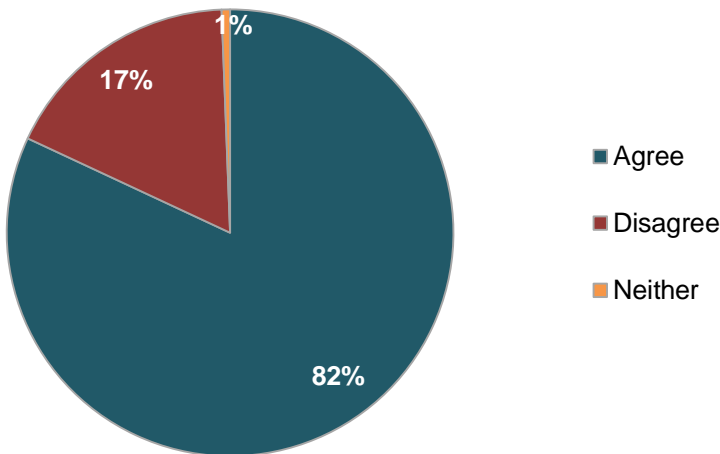
Whilst some thought the more information about a candidate the better, some supported the proposal with caveats, including the imposition of a word limit and standardised format for the statements. In terms of accessibility, a view was also expressed that paper copies should also be made available for the public.

Whilst in the minority, those who disagreed often expressed strong views. Many of these felt that a statement should be an option not a requirement.

There were, however, common concerns that this may place an excessive burden on council staff already working to capacity. Unsurprisingly, this view was particularly expressed by County or County Borough Councils, with 67% of those responding disagreeing with the proposal. The technicalities of verifying information provided by candidates was also queried, as was whether this burden should fall to the Returning Officer. A small number of respondents felt that the facility to publish information should be hosted centrally by the Welsh Government, as local authorities should not publish party political information. Assuming that the information would be published by local authorities, a small number of respondents questioned the costs involved.

Prohibition of Assembly member standing as council candidate

Q33. Do you agree that it should not be permissible to serve both as an Assembly Member and councillor?



Of the 659 individuals or organisations that responded to this question, 82% agreed that it should not be permissible to serve both as an Assembly Member and councillor. The main reason for supporting this proposal, and expressed by 69 respondents, was that it is not possible adequately to discharge both roles simultaneously, either in relation to the demands of the role, or the time commitment required to perform effectively. 38

respondents also noted that they felt there was a conflict of interests in being elected to two tiers of government, and that it would be difficult for a dual member to represent both tiers without some bias. A small number of respondents also raised concerns over whether it was appropriate to receive remuneration for both elected roles.

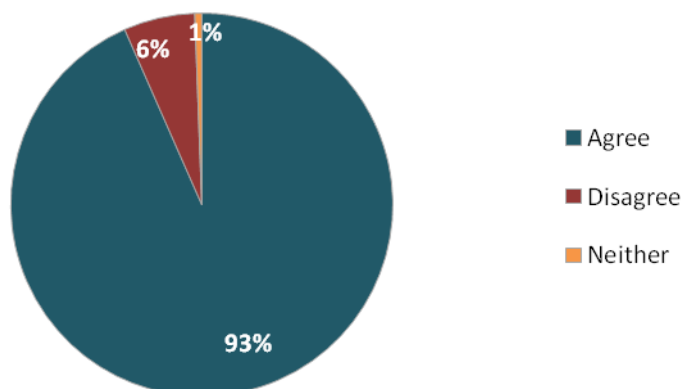
Of the 17% who felt that it should be permissible to hold both posts, the main reason for this was that there was no evidence to suggest this caused any problem at present or that it would be restricting democracy as it should be for the electorate to decide whether a candidate is fit to serve them. It was also noted in the responses that even if a councillor was prevented from becoming an Assembly Member, they could still hold any other full time employment that they wished.

Requirement to declare party affiliation

Q34. Do you agree that candidates should be required to disclose a party affiliation if they have one?

ER Q13. Do you think candidates need to say what political party they stand for?

YF Q19. Do you think candidates should say which political party they are part of, if they have one?



There were 682 respondents to this consultation question. 93% agreed that candidates should be required to disclose a party affiliation, 6% disagreed and 1% neither agreed nor disagreed. 185 young people responded to this question in the Youth Friendly version of the consultation. 95% were in favour of candidates declaring party affiliation.

There was majority agreement across categories of respondent to this question, however this differed slightly for the category identified as members of the public where 38 of 556 total responses in this category chose to disagree.

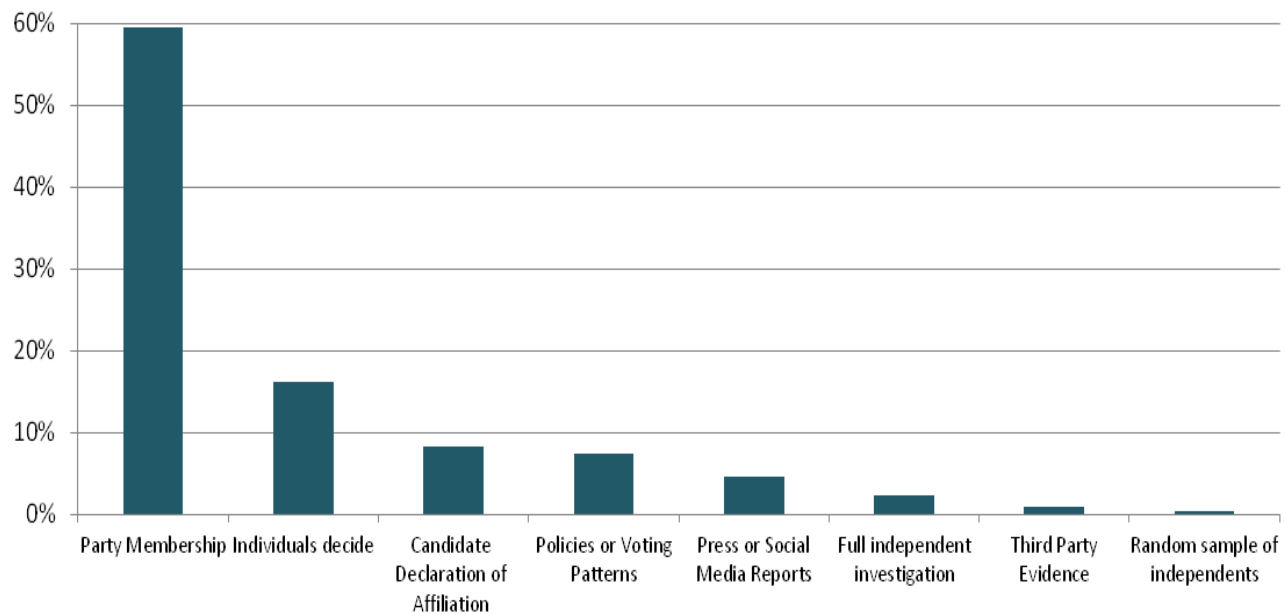
Of the 41 respondents overall that disagreed with the proposal several included comments which may indicate that they did in fact support the approach such as commenting “yes, this is a must” or “unless it is party membership”. One further respondent indicated support for the transparency which would arise as a result of the proposal but that support for transparency was subject to further discussions.

Several respondents questioned how the proposal would be enforced and the consequences of not declaring a party membership. Suggestions of consequences included disqualification and more analysis on these issues can be found in question 35 which follows.

There were additional points raised about whether a period of moratorium should be applied after an election where it would not be possible for a candidate to join a political party where they had declared themselves as an independent.

To be understood fully, this summary should also be read with the summary of question 35 which asks for further suggestions about the evidence which would be useful to help determine political party membership.

Q35. What sort of evidence should be required to suggest there is an undisclosed party affiliation?



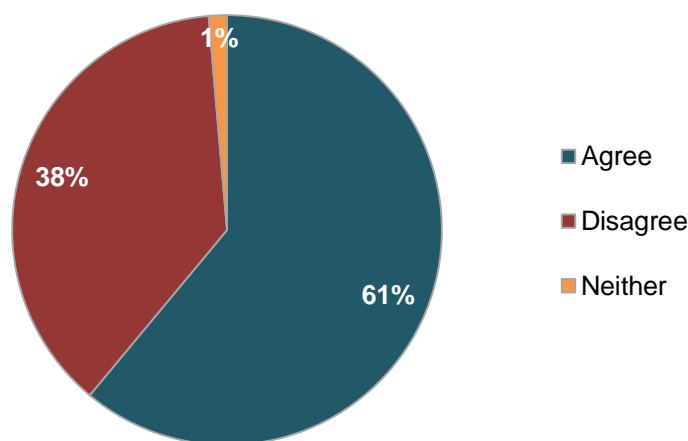
211 individuals or organisations responded to this question. 60% of those respondents suggested the evidence should be in the form of membership lists of political parties although not all were specific about how that information should be provided and to whom. Several respondents suggested introducing a requirement on parties to provide this information where applicable. Several responses suggested evidence should be provided by political parties to Returning Officers which could then be utilised in the event of a complaint being received.

16% suggested it should be entirely for the individuals to decide how to evidence their affiliations and 8% suggested a candidate’s declaration of affiliation should suffice. 7% thought the candidates voting practices and policies would be useful evidence and 5% thought press and social media evidence should be used. A number of respondents reiterated that the policy should be specifically about membership of a political party as opposed to a general preference toward a particular party’s policies.

Suggestions of documentary evidence include party membership number, or financial contribution to a party as indication of affiliation. There was less support for full independent investigation, third party evidence and random sampling of independents at 2%, 1% and 0% respectively. There was support for disqualifying a candidate who had been found not to have a declaration of party affiliation.

Allowing council staff to stand for their own council

Q36. Should any council staff below senior level be able to stand for election to their own authority?



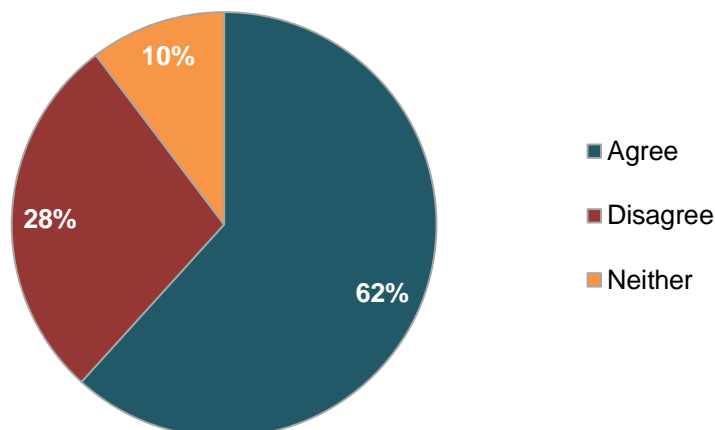
Strong views were expressed in response to this question, with a small majority of 61% of respondents agreeing that council staff below senior level should be able to stand for election to their own authority.

The main reasons given in support of this proposal were that everyone should be free to stand as a candidate and not be discriminated against. However, 31 respondents who agreed with the proposal suggested that Wales should follow the Scottish practice of requiring successful candidates to resign their employment upon being elected. 17 respondents in agreement also suggested that there should be a clear mechanism in place to identify and/or declare any conflicts of interest arising should the individual be elected. It was noted by a small number of respondents that the experience staff have gained in working for the council could be a valuable asset to them if elected.

Of those disagreeing with the proposal a large proportion, 53 in total, disagreed due to the conflict of interest which would arise between holding employment with and being elected to the same body. Some would agree with the proposal if successful candidates were required to resign immediately, but others felt that governance of the organisation would be compromised or employees would have had access to privileged information which would give them unfair advantages as a candidate.

Concerns were also expressed by a small number of respondents over arrangements for campaigning and whether any leave taken in order to campaign prior to the election would be at the cost of the taxpayer.

Q37. Is there still justification for councils to keep a list of those other than senior officers who should be politically restricted?



The statistics show that the majority of respondents would support the keeping of a list of politically restricted officers by 62% to 28%, with 10% of respondents not expressing a view either way. Many people answering this question were unaware of the meaning of a 'politically restricted post', or were not fully aware the purpose of keeping such a list, and this was reflected in many of the comments received and may have contributed to the number of 'neither responses'

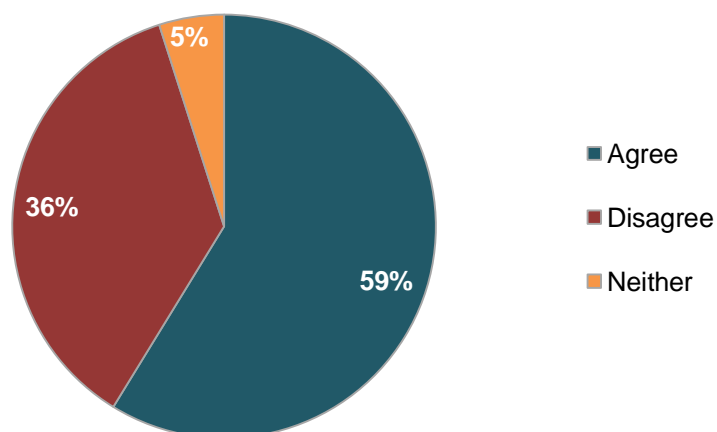
Of those in favour, the views expressed were that this was important to ensure the integrity of the council and its staff and also to maintain trust and transparency in the organisation. Some respondents also noted that maintaining a list would ensure that no conflicts of interest would develop for staff. It may be worth noting that 74% of county councils which responded to this question and 67% of elected members were in favour of keeping the list.

Of the 28% who disagreed with the list, their reasons were varied. Some disagreed because they felt that all local government posts should be politically restricted and therefore a list wouldn't be necessary. Others, whilst still disagreeing with the proposal in principal, felt the list should be abolished because it was anti-democratic to prevent people from being politically active. One respondent noted that the list should not be necessary as any political misconduct would be covered by the council's code of conduct for staff.

6. Returning Officers

Ending right to personal fee for returning officer

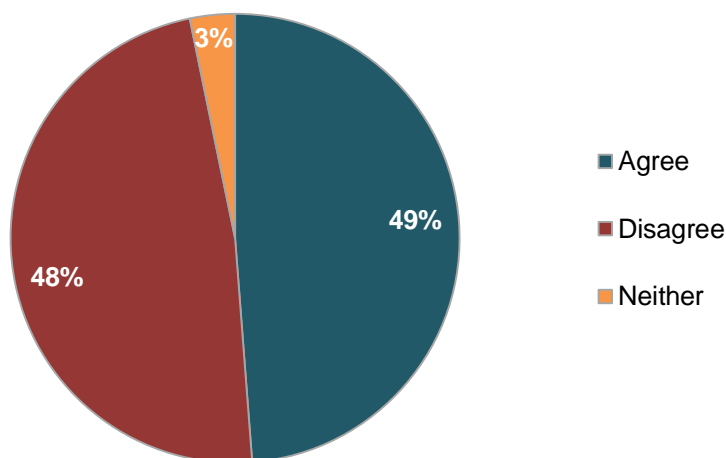
Q38. Do you agree that the statutory chief executive role should include that of returning officer?



Although the majority of respondents to this question opted in favour of including the role of Returning Officer within that of the council Chief Executive by 59% to 36%, there were mixed views within the responses. Many felt that local discretion should be retained by the council itself to decide upon whom was the most appropriate individual for the job. Eleven respondents felt that any senior officer within the council should be permitted to take on the role, whilst ten respondents felt that the RO should be someone completely independent of the council and the political parties. Others felt that as the role of RO was currently distinct from that of chief executive, or any other member of council staff for that matter, that this offered the required degree of independence and this should not be compromised by making it part of the chief executive role. It was a strongly held view that independence was key to the role of the RO.

Those in favour of this proposal noted that it would offer better value for money to local government as Chief Executives were already well remunerated and the highest paid council staff, and therefore the extra duties should fall within their role. Some argues that if the roles were combined there would be no need for any extra remuneration relating solely to the role of RO. A small number of the respondents in favour of this proposal expressed the opinion that the ability for the RO to delegate their functions where necessary should be retained.

Q39. Do you agree that any addition to salary in recognition of returning officer duties should be a matter for the local authority to determine?



617 individuals or organisations responded to this question, and the result was very close with 49% in favour of returning officer salaries being a matter for the local authority, but 48% against and 3% expressing a neither view.

From considering the written open responses to this question, it may be that the figures above cannot be taken at face value, and more value can be obtained from considering the comments made by respondents. Many did not answer the question posed directly, but rather shared their views on what the best system for remuneration of ROs would be.

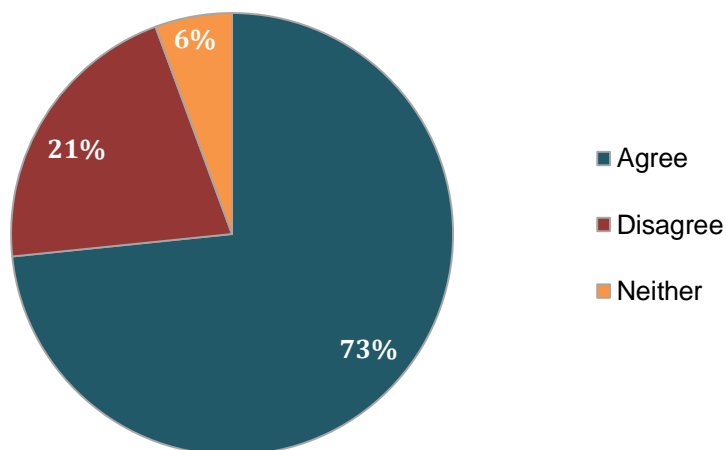
Of those in favour of the proposal that additional salary for returning officer duties should be a matter for local authorities, views were expressed that the amounts to be paid should be publically declared. It was also noted that this could be done by way of a formula to ensure that variation between different authorities was accounted for, or that there should be some form of cap imposed to prevent authorities paying excessive sums.

Of those who expressed disagreement with the question posed, 67 individuals felt that the remuneration for ROs should be set nationally, with another 23 suggesting that Welsh Government, the Assembly, or the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales should have some involvement in setting that remuneration. 21 respondents disagreed on the grounds that they felt no extra remuneration should be paid to returning officers, and a further 19 noted that if the role of returning officer was to become a statutory function of the chief executive as referred to in question 38 then additional remuneration was not necessary.

A small number of respondents, mostly county or county borough councils felt that current arrangements were adequate and that no change was necessary. It was also noted in these responses that at present, some ROs did not take a personal fee for running local government elections.

Simplifying fees and charges system

Q40. Should Welsh Government move to a system of calculating Assembly election costs on an agreed formula, based on the size of electorate?

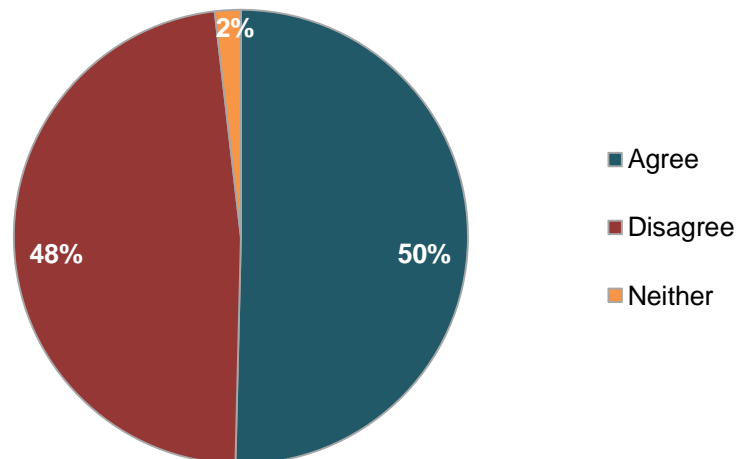


At 73% (430 responses), the majority of respondents were in favour of this proposal. 15 of the 430 felt that the formula should be weighted in some way to take account of the rurality of some constituencies. A small number of respondents also noted that the amounts paid under the formula should be published in the interests of transparency. Some supported the introduction of a formula-based payment, but thought it should be calculated according to the election turnout rather than the numbers comprising the electorate.

Of the 123 respondents opposed to developing a formula, 34 stated that the physical size of a constituency, or its rurality, has a significant bearing on election costs and, as such, a simple formula based on size of the electorate would leave some areas underfunded. Others who were opposed felt that the current system was adequate and there was no need to change it, or that there should be a fixed fee for election costs rather than a formula-based calculation.

7. Prisoner voting

Q41. Should Welsh prisoners be allowed to register to vote and participate in Welsh local government elections? If so, should it be limited to those sentenced to less than twelve months, four years, or any sentence length?



The response to this question was finely balanced, with 50% in favour of allowing Welsh prisoners to vote in local government elections, 47% disagreeing and 3% not expressing a view either way.

Of those who supported the notion, the majority expressed views that, despite their incarceration and limited liberties, prisoners were still citizens and, accordingly, they should not be denied the 'human right' to vote. In support of this, some referenced the European Court of Human Rights ruling on prisoner voting. Many also made the case for allowing prisoners to vote as part of their rehabilitation in preparation for re-entering broader society. Concerns were raised, however, about whether Welsh female prisoners would be disadvantaged as there are currently no prison facilities in Wales for women. Some were also concerned that Welsh male prisoners serving sentences in England might also be at a disadvantage.

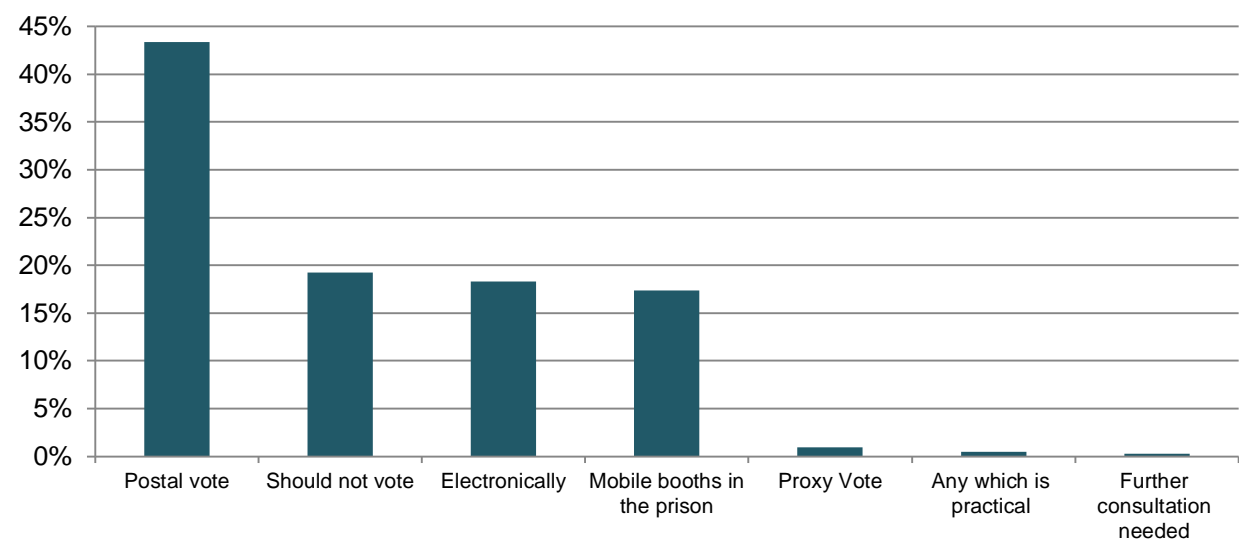
A large number expressed a view about whether length of sentence should have any influence over a right to vote. The majority of those, 94 respondents, felt that all prisoners should be enfranchised regardless of sentence length. 38 respondents felt that *only* those serving a sentence of 12 months or less should be enfranchised; 19 suggested a sentence of four or fewer years; and 16 respondents suggested prisoners should only be enfranchised where their release date fell within the term of the body they would be electing. 10 respondents suggested that enfranchisement should not be related to sentence length, but rather the nature or severity of the crime committed, with suggestions that those convicted of serious crimes, such as acts of terrorism, murder or sexual offences, should never be enfranchised.

The principal reason cited by those opposed to proposals to enfranchise prisoners were that prisoners automatically lost their right to vote once they were found guilty of a crime against society. The very act of serving custodial sentences reflected that they had been removed

from society and had, accordingly, lost the right to participate in its processes, including democratic ones.

A small number of respondents also expressed concerns over the perceived complexities of running an election within prisons, or the administrative burdens of administering postal votes.

Q42. By what method should prisoners cast a vote?



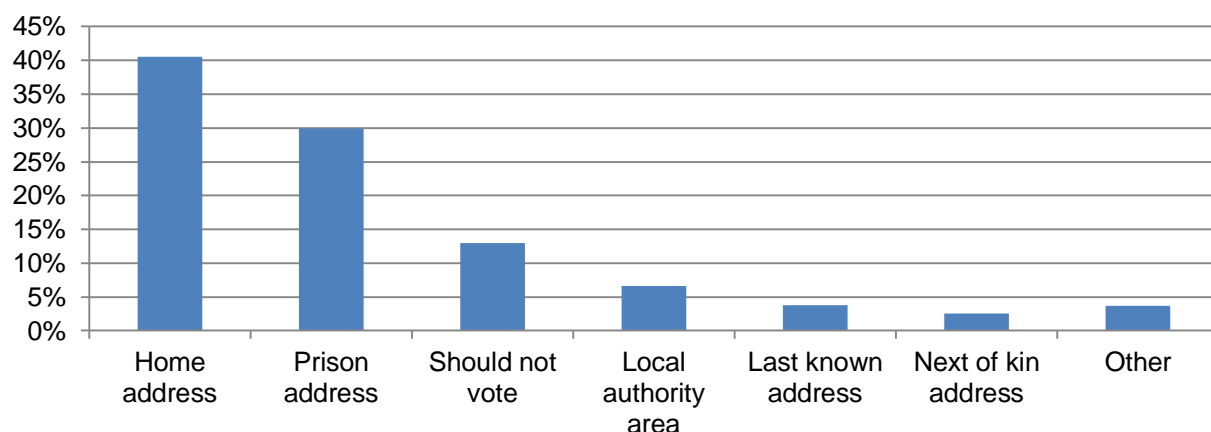
The responses to this question were relatively direct with respondents offering straightforward views on which methods of voting they felt were most appropriate for prisoners.

The strongest support (43%) amongst respondents favoured postal voting as the most appropriate method. Electronic voting was the second most frequent suggestion at 18%. Many respondents felt that both of these methods would be appropriate, but that one may be more convenient than the other.

17% of respondents favoured mobile polling booths being set up in prisons, but some queried to whom this responsibility and its management should fall: prison staff or returning officer staff.

A very small number of respondents suggested proxy voting would be appropriate and one individual also felt that, should prisoners be enfranchised, further consultation would be needed on the method by which they would vote.

Q43. At what address should prisoners be registered to vote?



As with responses to Q.42, respondents offered straightforward views on where prisoners should be registered to vote. The majority, 41%, favoured voting registration based on a prisoner's home address. Some respondents noted that using the home address is the current method applied to allow service voters to register. (In their comments, 30 respondents gave their own home address details in response to the question. We have deleted these details and assumed this to indicate that respondents were suggesting prisoners should register at their own home address.)

Roughly a third of respondents suggested that the prison address should be used, particularly for those prisoners serving 'lengthy' sentences or without any home address. However, some raised concerns about the effect this could have on the electorate in the ward where the prison was located: *"Simply registering them in the prison's address would be undesirable - a particularly large prison would result in a de facto prison ward."*

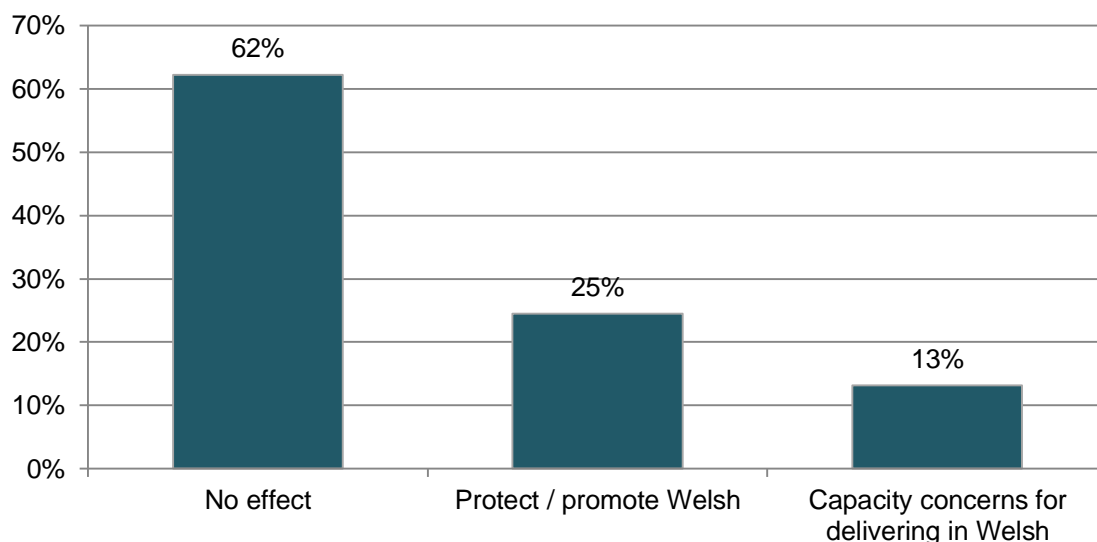
13% of respondents chose to respond to this question by further reiterating their opposition to prisoners should be given the vote.

The remaining respondents supported the registration of prisoners at an address or within an area that they have some connection to. It was suggested that this could be a 'next of kin' address, or the local area in which a prisoner lived, or was previously an elector in, prior to their imprisonment. It did not have to be a specified home address in this case. Similar provisions currently exist for homeless people to be able to declare a connection to a local area to enable them to be registered to vote.

Welsh language

Q44. We would like to know your views on the effects that electoral reform would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

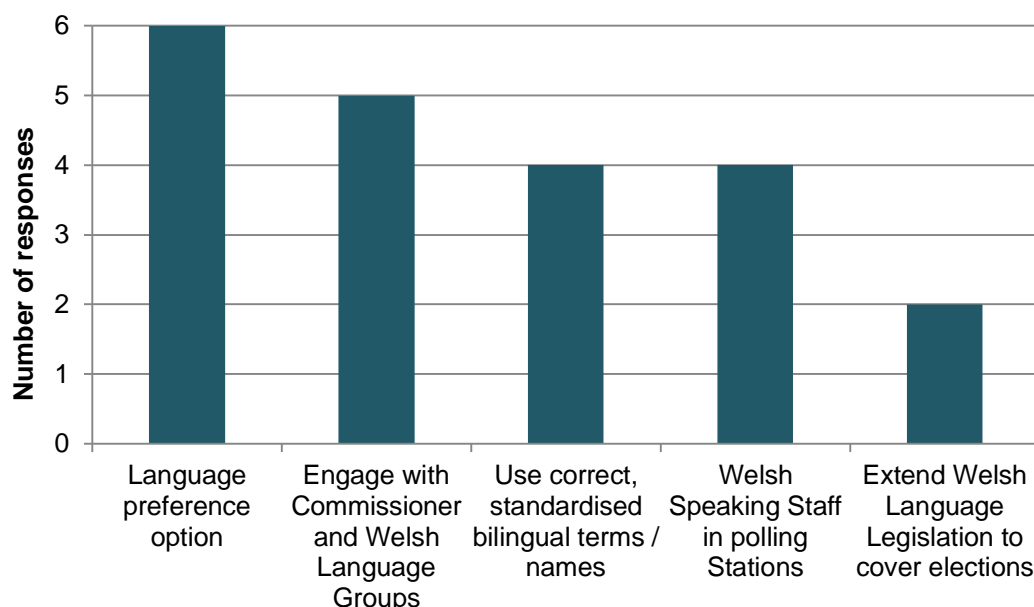
What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?



The majority of the 53 responses to this question considered that reform would not affect the Welsh language - either positively or negatively. Many highlighted the need to continue to ensure that Welsh was treated equally to English, as required by legislation. Of the very few comments which foresaw positive or negative effects on the Welsh language, one highlighted that more Welsh-speakers would be required were there to be increased numbers of polling stations. Four others called for Welsh-speaking officials in each polling station. Another commented that introducing electronic voting and online registration would enhance options for presenting information bilingually.

A full response from the Welsh Language Commissioner highlighted not so much the Welsh language aspects of the proposed approaches, but the limitations of Welsh language promotion currently, highlighting a report that they had recently published on the National Assembly for Wales and Police and Crime Commissioners elections held in 2016, which was a follow-up to a report which had considered the 2015 General Election.

Q45. Please also explain how you believe the proposed options could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.



In response to this question, 18 respondents provided thoughts on how the proposals could be amended to promote the Welsh language.

Of these, six commented that voters should be able to choose which language they preferred and five referred to the importance of engaging with the Welsh Language Commissioner and Welsh Language Groups in improving processes.

In line with Q.44, four comments set out that there should be Welsh-speaking people in each polling station and/or highlighted the importance of using clear and accurate Welsh language in order to maintain standards. One respondent suggested that Welsh language legislation should be extended to cover elections.

Other

Q46. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

This final, open, question elicited 28, often varied, responses, with several reinforcing comments they had made to previous questions. Of these, four made further representations in support of Single Transferable Votes. Another respondent restated their case for compulsory voting, also suggesting that a category of 'none of the above' should be introduced simultaneously, allowing voters to actively abstain.

Two respondents again highlighted their preference to move increasingly towards digital approaches. There were calls to increase the diversity of candidates and to take approaches to increasing levels of participation.

A number of the comments related to how the proposals put forward could best be implemented. Several highlighted the need to ensure that voters were not confused while changes were being made and the risk of inconsistency within Wales and with the rest of the UK. Others stressed the need to ensure appropriate impact assessments were

conducted, including assessing the potential risk of fraud and assessing the funding required to support implementation of the proposal. One commented that the proposals should not be considered in isolation as they are inter-linked, which should be reflected in evaluating their introduction and implementation.

The Association of Electoral Administrators called on the Welsh Government to ensure that any changes in election legislation were brought into effect well in advance of the affected polls. The Association proposed a minimum of 12 months is given for any proposals to change electoral registration, prior to the new provision(s) coming into force.

Two respondents raised concerns over the influence of unions, particularly over students and other young adults. One suggested that unions would be more credible if they had an opt-in policy for the political levy instead of an opt-out (which the respondent asserted it was difficult to find) or a choice of where the levy should go.

Several other specific matters were suggested by individual respondents:

- Need to review the process by which seats are allocated to wards in those authorities which include multi-member wards. The respondent stressed that importance of this as unless seats were redistributed to reflect changes in the distribution of the electorate within an authority, then the principle of equal representation is violated.
- Enabling young people in secure accommodation to vote
- The use of photo or finger-print or eye/iris identity cards
- Reduction in the number of councils and councillors
- All candidates for elections to automatically be issued with a list of late additions to the electoral register and the list of postal votes without having to ask for it.
- Introduce a requirement for candidates to disclose any spent convictions when seeking election.
- Whether we still require 10 nominees for local government candidates
- The Electoral Commission to develop bilingual templates that are legally correct and up to date, that can be used by all local authorities with confidence. This would provide an equality of language usage across Wales and ease the burden of administration for local authorities.
- It is hoped that the particular and often special circumstances and requirements relating to community and town council elections can be looked at more closely in the near future.
- Funding to be made available to conduct voting campaigns in languages reflecting the demographic of areas where the first language of a large proportion of the population is neither English nor Welsh in order to encourage voters from these communities.

5. Next Steps

5.1. The Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services issued a statement to the Assembly on 30th January 2018 which is at Annexe 1.

5.2. Legislative proposals concerning local government elections in Wales will be included in a Local Government Bill which it is intended will be introduced to the Assembly later this year.

6. List of Respondents

(Richard) Stephen Phillips	Cllr Emma Sandrey
Adrian Kendon	Cllr Les George
Adrian Price	Cllr Lesley Walton
ALACE	Cllr Mark Child
Albert Owen MP	Colin
Alex Hadley	Colwinston Community Council
Alpay Torgut	Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Andrew Capel	Conwy County Borough Council
Andy Fryer	Councillor Peter Jones
Anglesey Council	Cyngor Cymuned Ciliau Aeron
Arnold Woolley	Cyngor Cymuned Llanengan
Association of Electoral Administrators	Cyngor Gwynedd
Averil Rees	Cyngor Tref Aberystwyth
Bethany Walpole-Wroe	Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales
Bevan Stephens	D. Marc Rogers
Brecon and Radnorshire Labour Party	Dafydd Jones
Brecon Town Council	Dan Ward
Butetown Labour Party	Daniel Lawrence
Caerphilly CBC Labour Group	David Anstee
Caerphilly County Borough Council	David Eric Stanley
Cardiff West Constituency Labour Party	David Kakande
Carmarthenshire County Council	David Lewis
Carol Ivory	David Roberts
Caroline Adams	Democracy Club
Catriona Waldron	Denbighshire County Council
Ceredigion County Council	Denis Mollison
Children in Wales	Diane Madeley
Children's Commissioner for Wales	Dilwar Ali
Christine Roach	Dr Ashley Wood
Christopher Holley	Dr Chris Culnane & Dr Vanessa Teague
Christopher W Drew	Dr Chris Finlayson
City & County of Cardiff	Dr Colin Swatridge
City and County of Swansea	Dr Toby James
Clive Terence Griffiths	Duncan Stewart

Dylan Evans
Edna Irene Palmer
Edward Dawson
Edward Reid
Electoral Commission
Electoral Reform Society
Elliot Bateman
Emma Evans
Equality & Human Rights Commission
Erik Williams
Ewan Goodjohn
Ffion Pritchard-Johnson
Fleur Lewis
Flintshire County Council
Gareth Davies
Gareth Evans
Gareth Kitchen
Garry Telford
Geldards
Gelligaer Community Council
George Weston
Georgina
Girlguiding
Giselle Evans
GMB, Britain's General Union
Godfrey Northam
Greg Whitfield
GWYN WILLIAMS
Harry Hayfield
Helen Jones
Henry Ashurst
Hirwaun & Penderyn Community Council
Hugh Jones
Hugh Jordan
Huw Evans

Huw Llewelyn Jones
Huw Williams
Ian Graham
Ian Johnson
Ian Robinson
Institute of Welsh Affairs
Ivor Thomas Rees
Jack Price
James Ball
James Dowden
James Downey
Jean Holloway
Jeff Bowles
Jeffrey Baxter
Joan Thomas
Joe Feely
John A Calder
John Crocker
John David Wilkins
John Ellis
John Ivor Jones
John Matthews
John Sexton
John Smith
John Steedman
John Upright
Jon Lodge
Josh Morris
Joshua Osborne
Judith Marquand
Julia Goode
Julie Owens
Karl White
Keith Best
Keith Roberts

Kelvin Stockwell
Ken Barker
KEN PRYDDERCH
Kenneth MacArthur
Kevin Norman
Kirsty McGovern
Knackered
Lawyers in Local Government
Lee Robson
Leon Ward
Lis Puw
Lisa Parkinson
Llandough Community Council
Llandrinio & Arddleen Community Council
Llandysilio Community Council
Llanelli Rural Council
Llansantffraed Community Council
Local Democracy and Boundary
Commission for Wales
Luke Lincoln
Lyn Hudson
M Cox
Make Votes Matter
Malcolm Cousins
Marc Noel
Marc Thomas
Marcus Van Doorn
Marjorie Rickerby
Mark Anthony
Mark Hathway
Mark Whitcutt
Martin Bentley
Martin Evans
Martin James Hughes
Mel ab Owain

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Michael Anthony Harrison
Michael Boyle
Michael Havard
Michael Male
Michael Williams
Mick Antoniw AM
Mike Digwood
Mike Edwards
MM JJaammeess
Monmouthshire County Council
Moyà Russ
Mr Aidan Moyles
Mr Andrew J Abbott
Mr Davies
Mr Ian Cox
Mr Wayne Bartlett
Mrs V Jones
Neale Atkinson
Neath Port Talbot County Borough
Council
Neil McEvoy AM
Neil Moffatt
Neil Reed
Nerina Vaughan
Newtown and Llanuwchaiarn Community
Council
Nicholas Tatam
Nick Barnett
Nick Canever
North Wales Police & Crime
Commissioner
NUS Wales
One Voice Wales
Owen James Yarranton Brown

P J Ellis
Patricia Ashcroft
Patricia McCarthy
Patrick Mills
Paul Barrett-Brown
Paul Hoskins
Paul Kinnersley
Pembrokeshire County Council
Pentyrch Community Council
Pete Dunn
Peter Alston
Peter Berry
Peter Fanner
Peter Graham-Woolard
Peter Rowlands
Peter Sturgess
Peter Varley
Peter Weston
Phil Bale
Phil Raybould
Philip Bowyer
Philip Rapier
Philip Thompson
Philip Widdall
Philippa Bevan
Pontardawe Town Council
Pontarddulais Town Council
Powys County Council
Presbyterian Church in Wales
Prison Reform Trust
Rachel
Rachel Seabrook
Ray Hall
Rhodri Thomas

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC Plaid Cymru
Group
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough
Council
Rhys Taylor
Richard Carpenter
Richard Carr
Richard Lewis
Richard Lung
Richard Mainon
Richard Williams
Robert Jones
Robert Jones & Gregory Davies
Robin Rea
Roger Knight
Rolant Ellis
Ross
Ryan Smith
S Emlyn-Jones
Sam Parry
Sam Smith (D S Smith)
Sam Southall
Sam Trask
Samuel
Samuel Abe Williams
Sarah Eva
Scytl
Simon Jones
Smartmatic
SOLACE Wales
South Meirionnydd Branch Labour Party
Steve Bradwick
Stroke Association
Stuart Fox
Sue Butler

Swansea Council - Labour Party Group
Sylvia Brunsdon
Teresa Lewis
Thomas Gray
Tony Cooke
Tony Smith
Tony Walker
Torfaen CBC Labour Group
Unison
Vale of Glamorgan Constituency Labour
Party
Vale of Glamorgan Council Cabinet
Wales Deanery

Wales Green Party
Wales Institute of Social and Economic
Research, Data and Methods
Wayne Morgan
Webroots
Welsh Labour Party
William Baldwin
William Mcsparron
WLGA
Women's Equality Party: Cardiff Branch
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wyc Tippins
Youth Cymru

Annex 1 – Cabinet Secretary’s Oral Statement on Electoral Reform

**STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

TITLE **Reforming Electoral Arrangements in Local Government**

DATE **30 January 2018**

BY **Alun Davies AM, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government
and Public Services**

Llywydd, it is with great pleasure that I am able to outline today my proposals for taking forward reforms to the arrangements for local government elections, including who can vote, how they are registered, how people vote and who can stand for election.

I will be talking today about arrangements for local elections but I am hopeful that, with the work you have in hand, Llywydd, on reforms to this Assembly, that much the same arrangements will also end up applying to Assembly elections.

Legislative proposals concerning local government elections in Wales will be included in a Local Government Bill which I intend to bring to the Assembly later this year. The proposals are in keeping with the consultation last autumn, the detailed results of which I will be publishing very shortly.

Local democracy is all about participation. We want to boost the numbers registered as electors, make it easier for people to cast their votes, and give more people the right to take part.

We have seen how in recent years, the move to individual registration – which was rushed and under-prepared – has led to some groups of people dropping off the register. I intend to counteract that, in part, by enabling and encouraging Electoral Registration Officers to automatically add people to the register where they are satisfied with the information to hand. That should work particularly well with school students, where local authorities already have their details and simply need to transfer these to the ERO.

Anyone automatically registered would be added to the edited register, not the one available to marketing organisations, and they would be contacted to confirm their preferences and whether they would be happy to go on the full register or, in the case of anyone whose identity should not be revealed, to become registered anonymously.

I also intend to create an all-Wales electronic register, combining the registers held in each county, with a common format, making managing the registers more efficient and making easier the process of splitting registers at elections which cross county boundaries.

Voting at elections in this country has been conducted in more or less the same way since the nineteenth century. Most of us go to the polling station and put a cross on a piece of paper, using a heavy leaded pencil on a piece of string. Many people like this because it is a bit of an event, a chance to speak to the neighbours, and, in general, people trust it. But it is increasingly at odds with people's everyday lives, especially young people.

For this reason I intend to legislate for pilots at local elections and by-elections, which would explore electronic voting and counting, voting at different places and on different days. The Electoral Commission would need to evaluate any pilot before we moved to make anything permanent and widespread but time is overdue for making the voting process more modern and more flexible, observing, of course, the need to keep any system secure.

I am particularly pleased to be setting out these electoral reforms today because we will very shortly be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first women being allowed to vote in elections in the UK and the introduction of universal male suffrage. It is therefore fitting that I am able to state my intention, making use of the powers due to be transferred to this body under the Wales Act from April, to extend the franchise further in a number of ways.

I intend that 16 and 17 year olds will be able to vote at the next local elections. We will be following Scotland in this and their experience already shows how much young people of that age welcome the opportunity and make use of it to further the democratic process. Within schools the Active Citizenship theme of Personal and Social Education will provide young people with an understanding of politics and the right to vote.

Everyone who has committed to life in Wales should be able to play their part in our democracy. We intend to allow anyone, from any nationality, who resides in Wales, to be able to register and vote in our elections. This will transcend the debate over the future of EU citizens' voting rights by making clear that people from all nations who have made their homes here should be able to participate in our democracy.

I am also exploring options for extending the rights of prisoners to vote in local government elections if their due release date falls before the end of the term of office of the council being elected. They would be able to vote by post or by proxy on the basis of a "connected address" in Wales, usually their last address.. People who are sent to prison need to feel part of the community when they are released and the right to vote will form part of this.

Local government will move to a five-year term, in keeping with the Assembly's term and that intended for the UK Parliament. Individual councils will be enabled to choose to change to the single transferable vote system. A change would first require two-thirds of the council in question to vote in favour of changing. The new system would have to be used for the next two rounds of ordinary elections.

I intend to make some changes governing candidacy at local elections. I want to follow the practice which already applies to Parliamentary elections and allow candidates to publish just the ward where they live rather than their home address on election documents. I also will put arrangements in place to enable candidates to publish policy statements on a council website.

I intend to make it easier for council employees to stand for election to their own council. At present, they have to resign before they can even stand as a candidate. I will change this so that they only have to resign if elected – and I will urge local authorities to offer career breaks for at least the first term of office. I am aware that some Members feel that at least

some council employees should be able to serve as councillors in their own authority and I will listen carefully to the deliberations on this matter during scrutiny. I believe the central issue here is around remuneration. If the levels of payments made to councillors for doing their job was more comparable with wages outside, taking a break from other employment would become more realistic and I intend to review this matter – together with the Independent Remuneration Panel – over coming months.

I strongly believe that Members of this Assembly should not also be councillors and I intend to legislate so that they become disqualified from council membership. I also am going to require candidates to declare any registered political party membership they have if they are not standing under a party banner. Failure to do so could result in disqualification.

Finally, I intend to amend legislation so that the role of returning officer will be undertaken by the council's chief executive. The returning officer, usually the council's most highly paid officer, will no longer be able to claim a personal fee from their own council – or for running Assembly elections. It is not publicly acceptable, particularly in the times when ordinary council workers are subject to such restraint.