

Agenda – Local Government and Housing Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 5

Meeting date: 7 December 2023

Meeting time: 12.30

For further information contact:

Catherine Hunt

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddHousing@senedd.wales

At its meeting on 30 November, the Committee agreed a motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to exclude the public from Item 1 of today's meeting

1 Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill – consideration of key issues

(12.30)

2 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(13.30)

3 Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill – Evidence from the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution

(13.30)

(Pages 1 – 26)

Mick Antoniw MS, Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution

Michael Kay – SRO for the Bill – Deputy Director, Elections Division, Welsh Government

Laura Mitchell – Government Lawyer, Legal Services, Welsh Government

Angharad Thomas–Richards – Electoral Reform Programme Advisor, Elections Division, Welsh Government

[Elections and Elected Bodies \(Wales\) Bill](#)

[Explanatory Memorandum](#)



**Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament**

4 Papers to note

(Page 27)

4.1 Letter from the Minister for Finance and Local Government – Diversity in local government

(Pages 28 – 33)

4.2 Letter from the Chair of Petitions Committee – P-06-1334 Make the Senedd More Representative of the Welsh Population

(Page 34)

4.3 Letter from the Minister for Climate Change – Legislative Consent: Renters (Reform) Bill

(Page 35)

4.4 Letter from Llamau to Finance Committee – Draft budget 2024–25

(Pages 36 – 39)

4.5 Letter from Gorwel – Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 40 – 41)

4.6 Survey findings – Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill

(Pages 42 – 53)

5 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (ix) to resolve to exclude the public for the remainder of the meeting

6 Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill – consideration of key issues

(15.00)

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Agenda Item 4

Local Government and Housing Committee

7 December 2023 – papers to note cover sheet

Paper no.	Issue	From	Action point
Paper 1	Diversity in Local Government	Minister for Finance and Local Government	To note
Paper 2	Petition P-06-1334 – Make the Senedd More Representative of the Welsh Population	Chair of Petitions Committee	To note
Paper 3	Legislative Consent: Renters (Reform) Bill	Minister for Climate Change	To note
Paper 4	Draft budget 2024-25	Llamau to Finance Committee	To note
Paper 5	Draft budget 2024-25	Gorwel	To note
Paper 6	Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill	Survey findings	To note



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA-RE-2788-23

John Griffiths MS
Chair
Local Government and Housing Committee
Senedd Cymru
SeneddHousing@senedd.wales

27 November 2023

Dear John,

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee entitled Diversity in Local Government – October 2023

Thank you to the Committee for their valuable work in this important area of Diversity in Local Government. The Committee's consideration of the oral and written evidence presented before them has produced a helpful report and recommendations which build upon the Committee's recommendations in its report on the same subject in 2019.

The Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity within elected office and enabling individuals who wish to stand for election within their communities to do so.

Your report focusses on a number of important issues, including working together to raise awareness and promote job-sharing for executive roles, encourage individuals to provide valuable insights and views through the candidates' survey and support and promote opportunities for disabled individuals and other under-represented groups to participate fully in local democracy. These are areas where work is already underway, but there are always further steps which can be taken to improve opportunities for individuals.

The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill currently progressing through the Senedd builds on this approach and will pave the way for schemes to be introduced which support people to participate in local democracy through standing for election and representing their communities.

We have commissioned and published a range of research which is informing the next phase of our Diversity in Democracy programme.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We will also want to be clear about what steps can be taken to assist individuals across the broader spectrum of protected characteristics. We also want to explore alternative arrangements to provide more tailored support arrangements for different groups dependent on the barriers they face. This will help us inform and develop future schemes of support.

We want to work with stakeholders and all partners to ensure a collaborative approach which achieves further progress in this area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the 'i' in Evans.

Rebecca Evans AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Finance and Local Government

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Local Government and Housing Committee entitled Diversity in Local Government:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work closely with the WLGA to improve the response rate to the Local Government Candidate Survey. This includes increasing awareness and promotion of the survey among candidates and councillors and sharing best practice between local authorities.

Response: Accept

We share the concerns raised by the Committee. The decrease in the number of individuals completing the survey is disappointing.

We will work partners with a range of partners to explore what further steps we can take to promote the importance of the survey and encourage a greater level of completion.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work with all partners, including local authorities, to identify areas of good practice to improve diversity in local government and to share and learn from those experiences.

Response: Accept

We will work with partners to identify opportunities to share best practice across Wales. This will include consideration, with partners, about the benefits of holding an event in Autumn 2024 to showcase best practice and develop new approaches to encourage greater diversity in local democracy.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendations 3 and 4

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work with the WLGA to assess the efficacy of all initiatives to increase diversity in local government, including the implementation and impact of Diversity Declarations.

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should keep under review and evaluate the impact of duties placed upon local authorities under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to promote democratic participation. This includes measuring the impact of local authority public participation strategies and sharing of good practice.

Response: Accept in Principle

We will work with partners to ensure key initiatives aimed at encouraging greater diversity area are kept under review to establish whether they are delivering on their aims.

We have issued comprehensive guidance to support local government diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as the Public Participation Strategies which must set out how the council will ensure the widest possible range of views from the public inform council

business. In Autumn 2024 we will assess how the strategies across Wales align with the published guidance. The outcome of this review will inform further work in this area.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work with all relevant partners to identify opportunities to further promote the Access to Elected Office Fund and the benefits of the fund.

Response: Accept

The Elections and Elected Members (Wales) Bill includes a requirement for Welsh Ministers to establish a financial support scheme for disabled people standing for elected office.

We will continue to work with Disability Wales and others to identify other ways we can support disabled people to fully participate in local democracy.

Financial Implications – The costs associated with the establishment of the fund on a legislative footing are set out in the supporting information to the Elections and Elected Members (Wales) Bill. Funding for individual schemes will be considered as part of the normal budget process.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should ensure that lessons learnt from the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office Fund are taken forward, ensuring there is sufficient and timely support for disabled candidates before future local government elections

Response: Accept

The outcome of the evaluation of the pilot fund will inform future fund arrangements.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should consider how initiatives such as the Access to Elected Office Fund could be expanded or developed in time for the next local government elections in order to support candidates from other under-represented groups. This work should be developed regardless of whether or not the provisions in the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill become law.

Response: Accept

The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill includes provision for arrangements to be put in place to remove the barriers to participation in elections for people from other protected characteristic groups and those impacted by socio-economic circumstances.

We will work with stakeholders to identify those barriers and what support can be put in place to make a positive difference. In the absence of the Bill becoming law, we will continue to work with others to deliver non legislative measures to improve participation.

Financial Implications – There would be a cost expanding the Fund, however these costs will be met from existing programme budgets.

Recommendations 8 and 9

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government, along with local government partners, should work together to raise awareness and promote job-sharing for executive roles.

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should facilitate greater sharing of local authorities' experiences of job-sharing in executive roles to understand the benefits and challenges associated with the provision. It should also ensure better collection of data on job-sharing to enable regular monitoring of the impact of job-sharing in contributing to improving diversity across authorities.

Response: Accept

We will continue to work with partners to promote the benefits and opportunities of job-share and explore with local government how information about job-share arrangements can better be shared amongst local authorities and how they can share best practice.

We have committed to consulting on extending job share provisions in respect of elected members in local government. This remains our aim.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should work closely with the town and community council sector to ensure sufficient support, training and resources are available to enable the use of multi-location meeting technology in all community councils in Wales

Response: Accept in Principle

Work has already begun to provide digital support, training and resources to the town and community council sector. This follows on from the Local Government Chief Digital Officer's (LGCEO) publication of a report into the digital readiness of community councils earlier this year.

Financial Implications – None. The Welsh Government has already made available up to £150,000 in 2023-24 to fund the delivery of a sector-led action plan to provide digital support to community and town councils, which includes the provision of hybrid meetings.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should, in light of the closure of Chwarae Teg, assess the capacity across Wales to deliver mentoring schemes and quickly identify how any gaps in provision can be filled.

Response: Accept

Mentoring schemes are a good way to introduce individuals to politics, provide a better understanding of the demands and opportunities of operating within local democracy.

Discussions have already taken place to assess the impact of the Chwarae Teg cessation of operations. Arrangements are in place with employers to continue the placements for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 cohorts, and the organisations have recruited for 23/24.

In addition, through the Equality and Inclusion Grant, Welsh Government provides funding to the Equal Power Equal Voice mentoring programme, led by WEN Wales in partnership with Disability Wales, EYSTN and Stonewall Cymru. Much of the funding for these arrangements is provided through Big Lottery funding.

Financial Implications – None. Future funding decisions about the Equal power Equal voice programme will be taken as part of wider budget decisions.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should provide an update to the Committee on the outcome of its work to bring key partners together to combat abuse in politics.

Response: Accept

This event is scheduled to take place in January 2024. In addition to updating the Committee about the outcome of the event the Committee will be invited to nominate a representative to participate.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that: The Welsh Government should continue to press the UK Government to take strong and robust action to tackle social media abuse.

Response: Accept

Candidates and serving local members and Members of the Senedd should be able to come forward and take part in the democratic process without fear of abuse.

We will continue to raise this matter with the UK Parliament alongside identifying steps we can take in Wales to combat the damaging increase of these inappropriate behaviours.

Financial Implications – None.

Agenda Item 4.2

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

John Griffiths MS
Chair
Local Government and Housing Committee
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29 November 2023

Dear John

Petition P-06-1334 Make the Senedd More Representative of the Welsh Population

The Petitions Committee considered the above petition at our meeting on 23 October, alongside correspondence from the Reform Bill Committee and the Petitioner.

At the meeting members agreed to write to your Committee in order to bring this petition to your attention and agreed to consider this petition again after Stage 1 proceedings for the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill have ended.

Further information about the petition, including related correspondence, is available on our website at: <https://business.senedd.wales/ielssueDetails.aspx?Ild=41308&Opt=3>.

If you have any queries, please contact the Committee clerking team at the e-mail address below, or on 0300 200 6454.

Yours sincerely



Jack Sargeant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Our ref JJ/PO/408/23

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Elin Jones MS
Llywydd
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
Email - Llywydd@senedd.wales

29 November 2023

Dear Elin

The UK Government introduced the Renters (Reform) Bill into Parliament on 17 May 2023. No Legislative Consent Memorandum was required at that time.

UK Government have been working on amendments to the Bill which will end the practice of landlords and agents arbitrarily applying “No DSS” and “No children” in respect of rental properties to tenants and prospective tenants. My officials have been working with UK Government counterparts to extend these provisions into Wales.

The amendments which seek to introduce the ban on these practices into England and Wales were laid on 15 November. Legal analysis of the clauses pertaining to the ban have been completed, but these provisions were part of 182 amendments to the Bill. Some of the amendments could potentially require further legislative consent, and although legal analysis of the further amendments has begun, it is not going to be completed in time to meet the normal two-week Standing Order 29 deadline. I will endeavour to lay the Legislative Consent Memorandum as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, Huw Irranca-Davies MS and the Chair of the Local Government and Housing Committee, John Griffiths MS.

Yours sincerely



Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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Agenda Item 4.4

Imagine a World Without
Homelessness

Llamau Submission to the Finance Committee:

Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2024-25

Introduction

Homelessness and housing support services in Wales are facing significant pressures. Demand for Llamau's services has increased substantially, and we are seeing a considerable increase in the number of young people we support who are presenting with very complex support needs. Our funding is for 'Housing Related Support', yet we must provide so much more than that, which simply isn't factored in – or paid for - in existing contracts. In some cases, it is this work which is literally keeping people with a history of serious self-harm, or suicide attempts, alive.

The cost of delivering services has increased significantly, despite there being no increases to the Housing Support Grant (HSG). Many of our contracts are paid between 20% and 30% less than the real cost for funding these services, as they did not take account of the hike in inflation. We are already subsidising low value contracts through our own charitable fundraising, but as individuals and businesses experience similar cost of living issues, this has become a much more challenging environment.

In addition, we are already being told by commissioners that early intervention, prevention, and floating support services are under threat as they focus efforts on crisis services. Welsh Government has put a welcome emphasis on the importance of early intervention to achieve the ambition of making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeated, but once these services are lost, the sector will simply not be able to meet the aims of the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.

Increase in demand for services:

Our Youth Homelessness Helpline received the highest number of calls last month, a 50% increase on previous months, highlighting both the increase in numbers of young people in crisis and the importance of early identification, prevention and intervention services.

Referrals have continued to increase for refuge spaces across Llamau, with 279 referrals for our 64 spaces in 2022/23 (an increase of 114 or 69% from last year). During this year we increased capacity by opening 2 dispersed refuges (in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council area). Demand for spaces meant we were unable to accommodate 90 referrals as refuges were full, and a further 16 were unable to be supported in the space that was available due to their support needs and/or family size.

In the community, our Floating Support services received 475 referrals, an increase of 20% compared to the previous year.

Staff wellbeing and retention:

Recruitment and retention of staff across the sector is extremely difficult. People are leaving for less stressful and higher paid roles elsewhere. This has significantly impacted on our ability to recruit and retain staff. In the last year, we have had to use agency workers to cover vacancies for the first time. The costs of doing this are very high compared with salaried staff and, given the increased demand across all support providers, it is a very competitive market.

National Living Wage increases are not included in our contracted funding, so we are expected to find the money from elsewhere. Whilst we welcome the increase for colleagues, we have no additional funding to pay for it. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, our lowest paid staff are now experiencing the same issues as the people we support, such as inability to pay bills, afford food shops, or pay rent.

This situation is unsustainable. Care services were given funding in last year's budget round to deliver Real Living Wage salaries for staff, but this did not happen for support services. Flat line budgets have led to wage deflation, and this is the primary cause of the recruitment and retention issue in the sector.

The Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending represented in resource allocations (Preventative spending = spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early).

The sector is being told by commissioners that prevention services are at risk as they need to concentrate funding on crisis interventions due to lack of funding. This is, in our view, a false economy as the preventative and early intervention services save money in the longer term, as these examples show:

- Mediation can sustainably prevent family relationship breakdown and the costly crisis of homelessness for a young person; saving over £27,000 per person in specialist supported accommodation costs.
- Family relationship breakdown is consistently shown to be the main driver of youth homelessness. Targeted early intervention like our mediation services can successfully enable young people to remain safely in their family home; preventing the significant costs of often inappropriate temporary accommodation – shown to have doubled in Wales in the last 5 years to over £40m.
- Supporting an individual to better manage their mental health through our specialist services such as counselling has a profound impact on their happiness and quality of life. Nearly £5 billion is lost through reduced productivity and healthcare costs in Wales annually.

- By facilitating re-engagement with education and preventing exclusion, our EMPHASIS outreach services can save the state an estimated £370,000 in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare, and criminal justice costs.

Is the support provided by the Welsh Government for third sector organisations, which face increased demand for services as a consequence of the cost-of-living crisis and the pandemic, sufficient?

Exiting the pandemic, we have seen an increase in complexity of needs and risk for the young people we are supporting, with greater experience of trauma and associated mental health and well-being needs. This is at a time when support from other agencies is more difficult to access.

The number of women facing homelessness because of domestic abuse is rising. However, there has also been a slowdown of availability of move on properties for women and families due to unprecedented demand for accommodation, and more general homelessness pressures.

The cost-of-living crisis has only exacerbated the problem, yet funding is not keeping pace with the rising demand for support services.

Conclusion

Llamau has always strived to deliver high-quality, effective support services, but it is difficult to see how services can be maintained at the current level without an increase in funding via the HSG. This is turn will see many more people unable to access the support they need in a timely manner.

The whole sector is struggling with increased demand, the complexity of needs and a lack of funding. Llamau, along with other support providers, has decided not to re-tender for some services as they simply can't be delivered to the standard needed with the funding available. There is nowhere left to go in terms of cost savings.

Without an uplift to the Housing Support Grant for the financial year 2024/25, there is a real risk of services collapsing, the early intervention agenda being lost – and with it, the opportunity to deliver the once in a generation change which the Welsh Government outlined in the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.

Paper 5
Agenda Item 4.5

This document provides a translation of correspondence received from Gorwel

Hen Argraffdy Ffordd yr Efail Llangefni Anglesey LL77 7ER 0300 111 2121	49 High Street Blaenau Ffestiniog Gwynedd LL41 3AN 0300 111 2121	Derwydd Heol y Dŵr Dolgellau Gwynedd LL40 1DD 0300 111 2121	Tŷ Silyn Penygroes Caernarfon Gwynedd LL54 6LY 0300 111 2122
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Mr John Griffiths MS
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee
Welsh Parliament

29 November 2023

Dear Mr Griffiths,

RE: Submission of evidence on concerns regarding Housing Support Grant for 2024/25

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chief Officer of Gorwel, the business unit within the Grŵp Cynefin housing association, which provides support services to people who are homeless or who at risk of losing their homes, and people who are experiencing domestic abuse. We work across Anglesey, Gwynedd and Denbighshire.

Clearly, we both understand the challenges facing the Welsh Government when making funding decisions, but what I would like to highlight is what is happening on the ground at the moment, as it very different from what has been seen previously.

As I'm sure you are aware, the current cost-of-living crisis is having a devastating impact on many people in our communities. We are seeing more and more people who have not previously needed support from organisations such as ours, and who are facing a future they could not have imagined, with no idea how to face what lies ahead. We are passionate about the communities in which we work, and we pride ourselves on providing a fully bilingual and inclusive service that does whatever it can to help individuals or families get through the situations that they face.

If the Welsh Government decides to continue to allocate the same level of funding, or else make cuts to the Housing Support Grant for 2024/25, there will be significant implications for Gorwel's budget and services. Without a significant increase in the Housing Support Grant, we will need to consider re-modelling plans, preventing an inflationary increase in colleagues' salaries for 2024/25, disposing of offices and safe spaces for survivors, making colleagues redundant, and returning some existing contracts to commissioners. Along with the actions outlined above, we also need to highlight the concerns set out below, which are affecting Gorwel.

- Of the 13 existing contracts that Gorwel has, only six are financially viable in 2024/25.
- The cost of maintaining service agreements has increased by 11 per cent compared to 2022/23.



Mae Grŵp Cynefin yn gymdeithas dai elusennol a gofrestrwyd o dan y Ddeddf Cymdeithasau Cydweithredol a Budd Cymunedol 2014 (rhif 21194R) a wedi cofrestru gyda Llywodraeth Cymru (rhif LO29)
Grŵp Cynefin is a charitable housing association incorporated under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (no. 21194R) and registered with the Welsh Assembly Government (no. LO29)

- For the 2023/24 budget, Gorwel has invested £189,315 worth of reserves in maintaining contracts, ensuring that Gorwel colleagues receive inflation adjustments in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis. This is not an option for 2024/25, and neither is it sustainable.
- There has been a significant increase of **77 per cent (which equates to 293 people)** in those receiving domestic abuse support from Gorwel, through the Housing Support Grant, up to the end of quarter 2 of 2023/24, compared with the previous year.
- There has been an increase of **8 per cent (which equates to 276 people)** in those receiving homelessness prevention support from Gorwel, through the Housing Support Grant, up to the end of quarter 2 of 2023/24, compared with the previous year.
- There has been an increase in the complexity of support needs. With less input from statutory services, frontline staff are spending more time responding to cases.
- If it becomes necessary to remodel and cut services, this will increase pressure on statutory services.
- Cuts to frontline domestic abuse services would increase the risk of domestic homicide in communities.
- Due to the instability of funding and the lack of wage inflation, the recruitment and retention of experienced staff with expertise in this area is extremely challenging.
- Staff in specialist services related to the Housing Support Grant are paid less for the same work as staff in the statutory sector.
- Because staff turnover is high, additional resources are needed to train new staff. Eighteen members of frontline staff terminated their employment at Gorwel in 2022/23. Ten members of Gorwel's frontline staff have terminated their employment up to quarter 2 of 2023/24. They have taken up roles in the statutory sector, which offers more favourable wages and employment conditions.

The frustration is that we know from studies that have been commissioned that the services that we provide ultimately save money. For every £1 invested in Gorwel's domestic abuse services, for example, £3.56 of social value is generated for the individual and the community. Similarly, for every £1 invested in Homelessness Prevention services, the social value generated is £9.

I trust that you, as the Local Government and Housing Committee, will pay close attention to the concerns outlined above and will encourage the Welsh Government to increase the Housing Support Grant.

Sincerely,



Osian Gwyn Elis

Chief Officer, Gorwel

CC Mr Peredur Owen Griffiths MS, Chair of the Finance Committee, Welsh Parliament
Pack Page 41

Survey findings

The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill

7 December 2023

The Local Government and Housing Committee is scrutinising the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill. As part of its Stage 1 scrutiny of the Bill, a survey was conducted which focused on Part 1, Chapters 2 and 3 of the Bill – Electoral registration without applications and Welsh elections piloting and reform.

The survey

1. A semi-structured, self-completion survey was open for a five week period, between 23 October – 26 November 2023. The survey was available to complete online and in hard copy upon request.
2. The survey asked 13 questions about the provisions in the Bill that relate to electoral registration without applications and Welsh elections piloting and reform. Respondents were provided with background information on current arrangements and the proposed changes.

Promotion

1. The survey was promoted through a variety of channels including, but not exclusively:-



- Senedd Cymru's social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter). Targeted ads were also arranged to encourage responses from areas where we tend to get a lower response rate.
- The networks and social media channels of key stakeholders. A social media toolkit and QR code were created to allow stakeholders and groups to easily share and promote the survey.
- Young people taking part in Senedd Outreach and Inbound Education and Youth Engagement sessions. The survey was also circulated to Welsh Youth Parliament Members.
- Events including TPAS Cymru's National Tenant Engagement Conference in Llandrindod Wells and a World Children's Day event in Wrexham.

Findings

2. To compile this summary, an analysis of the complete data set was conducted. All data can be sourced to individual responses and further analysis can be undertaken upon request. Each question in the survey is addressed in turn.
3. Results are calculated from the number of respondents who answered the specific question and not the overall number of respondents to the survey. There were 86 responses in total.
4. Please note that whilst this survey provides valuable insights into the perspectives of respondents, it is important to acknowledge that the findings may not be fully representative of the population. The data reflects the views of self-selecting individuals who participated in the survey, and variations may exist among different demographic groups or those who did not respond. As with any survey, the results offer a snapshot of the opinions within the sample. Caution should be exercised when generalising these findings to the broader population.
5. Responses were received from all five Senedd regions.

Question 1

An Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is responsible for compiling and maintaining the register of people who have the right to vote in an election, known as electors.

The Bill allows EROs to add eligible electors to the local government register in Wales without the elector needing to submit an application.

To what degree do you support the idea of automatically registering electors?

6. 58% of respondents to this question strongly supported the idea of automatically registering electors, with a further 28% somewhat supporting the idea. 8% somewhat opposed or strongly opposed the idea. 6% neither supported nor opposed the idea or selected 'Don't know'.

Question 2

Could you provide reasons for your answer? (for example, are there particular reasons why you support or oppose this proposed change?)

7. The majority of responses to this question were largely positive about the proposed changes. Three main themes emerged, with a number of respondents referencing more than one theme in their response.

8. The following provides a snapshot of responses, which focused on removing barriers to voting.

"I think everyone has a civic duty to use their vote. Any steps taken to improve accessibility and remove any barriers to participating in the democratic process, particularly amongst groups which may experience unique challenges, is surely a positive step."

"By automatically entering people to vote, you are removing a barrier within the electoral process. It may actively encourage more people who are disengaged with voting, take the final step to the polling station."

"There are enough barriers that stop people voting already. Registering to vote is another one, so I think it's a good idea to make it automatic. It's one less thing for people to do."

9. The proposed changes were considered a potential catalyst for **encouraging more people to vote** by some respondents. This was another prominent theme which emerged from the responses to this question, a snapshot of which are provided below:-

"I think it would encourage people to vote, if they're automatically registered. And we desperately need a higher voter turnout for Welsh elections."

"I understand that this proposal will bring Wales in line with other democratic countries. Increasing the opportunity for people to vote can only be a good thing."

"I think we should be encouraging more people to vote and making it easier for them to do this is the first step."

10. The third theme which emerged from the responses focused on the need to **simplify the voting process** to improve accessibility, particularly for certain groups, who may experience unique challenges.

"I agree with making the process easier. Some may not fully understand the process of registering to vote, and this could ensure that those who would like to be on the register, are."

"It simplifies the process and is more cost effective."

"Because it's much easier for elderly people and disabled people to be added to automatic electors instead of them having to fill out complicated forms it just makes things simpler for everyone."

Question 3

How can the Welsh Government best help people to understand the changes to the way in which eligible electors are added to the local government register in Wales? Please rank in order of preference.

11. Writing directly to the elector to let them know about the changes, was the option most often selected first by respondents to this question (36%), followed by communicating with the elector in some other way, for example, text message or e-mail (19%). A national information campaign was selected as first choice for 14% of respondents to this question, with 12% of respondents choosing a social media campaign as their first choice. A television and radio campaign was chosen first by 9% of respondents, with 8% choosing working with organisations like the Electoral Commission and local authorities to raise awareness as their first choice.

Question 4

If you think the Welsh Government could help people to understand the changes to the way in which eligible electors are added to the local government register in Wales in a way which is not listed in the previous question, please share your views with us below.

12. 23 responses were received from respondents to this question, who suggested alternative ways (to the options outlined in question 3 of the survey) of helping people to understand the changes to the way in which eligible electors are added to the local government register in Wales.

13. Whilst no predominant theme emerged from the answers, the subject-matter most often raised by respondents to this question focused on **education**.

“Compulsory education in schools.”

“Education for young people at school, college and university. Businesses offering professional learning on voter registration. Short social media videos starring famous Welsh people.”

“Engaging with high school, sixth forms/colleges and universities.”

14. This was followed by the need to ensure that **any information regarding the process is accessible to all**.

“Easy Read campaign or at the very least plain English.”

“Circulate easy read information.”

“So far, this process has not been accessible for people with learning disabilities to understand and engage with. It is important that consultations and information about changes are provided in easy read.”

Question 5

The full register is a version of the register that includes the name and address of everyone who is registered to vote, except those who register to vote anonymously. The open register is an extract of the full register. This

version is available to anyone who wants to buy it, such as businesses or charities. Anyone can opt out of the open register.

To ensure young and vulnerable electors are protected, the open electoral register in Wales will be removed for Welsh elections.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with removing the open electoral register for elections in Wales?

15. 71% of respondents to this question strongly agreed to somewhat agreed with removing the open electoral register, whilst 12% strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed. 17% neither agreed nor disagreed or selected 'Don't know.'

Question 6

Could you provide reasons for your answer? (for example, are there particular reasons why you agree or disagree with this change?)

16. Two main themes emerged from the responses to this question; the need to protect vulnerable groups and the potential misuse of personal data.

17. The following quotes provide a snapshot of responses which referred to a need to protect vulnerable groups, with some addressing the specific challenges certain groups may encounter.

"Any steps taken to protect vulnerable groups is a good thing. As a citizen, I see no particularly strong reason to retain the open register."

"Acts as a safeguarding measure for vulnerable and/or young people."

"Safety is a huge risk factor and I support any thing where we are minimising the risk to vulnerable people in Wales."

"Many people with learning disabilities are not comfortable with their information being on an open register and bought for whatever purpose, especially when the purpose has nothing to do with voting. Understanding the difference between the full and open registers can be difficult, and opting out can be difficult to understand too. Removing the open register seems a good solution to protecting young and vulnerable voters."

18. Responses which focused on the use of personal data were also interlinked with concerns regarding the privacy of an individual.

"I think that people need to be made aware of the open register and how available their information is to groups that can buy that data. Concerns about privacy and data protection are significant. Protecting the privacy and security of individuals, especially vulnerable groups, is crucial. Moreover, the balance between transparency and privacy must be carefully weighed to ensure the democratic process is fair and equitable for all."

"It makes sense for public protection and to prevent the potential misuse of private data."

"Data shouldn't be for sale."

"I wouldn't want other businesses or charities knowing my information."

19. It is important to note that whilst most responses were in favour of removing the open register, some responses referred to the potential drawbacks associated with removing the open register.

"The electoral register is a useful document for many legitimate purposes including research and political campaigning. In a democracy this information should be freely available unless people express a wish to be registered anonymously."

"I was under the impression that being on the open register can improve your credit score which, for young people who have a limited credit history, may put young people at a disadvantage."

"Lack of open registration makes campaigning more difficult - also, with local knowledge, an open register makes it more likely that 'missing voters' can be identified and registered."

Question 7

Do you think removing the open electoral register is enough to protect young and vulnerable electors?

20. 46% of respondents to this question selected 'Don't know'. 35% of respondents said that removing the open electoral register was enough to protect young and vulnerable electors, whilst 18% said it was not enough.

Question 8

What additional safeguards do you think are necessary in order to protect young and vulnerable voters?

21. 13 responses were received to this question. The main theme which emerged focused on education and the need to raise awareness about the changes if implemented.

"Education and use of social media to help youngsters understand the issues."

"Make sure they know they can register anonymously - or if the register becomes an automatic register, make sure you raise awareness of the ability to then make an application to be anonymous."

"Education, young people need to be educated in an unbiased manner. Online information such as TikTok is also a great way to inform and protect young voters."

Question 9

Whilst the open register will be removed for Welsh elections, it will remain for UK Parliamentary elections. Electors in Wales will also still need to register to vote in UK Parliamentary elections.

Some have raised concerns that this may result in confusion and eligible electors potentially being deprived of the right to vote in some elections, known as disenfranchisement.

To what extent do you agree with the concerns raised?

22. 73% of respondents to this question strongly or somewhat agreed that removing the open register for Welsh elections may result in confusion. 10% strongly or somewhat disagreed with the concerns raised, whilst 17% neither agreed nor disagreed or selected 'Don't know.'

Question 10

Could you provide reasons for your answer? (for example, what risks do you foresee?)

23. The majority of responses to this question focused on a lack of understanding amongst members of the public about devolution and the need to raise awareness about the differences between Welsh elections and UK elections.

“The knowledge of different elections among the public isn’t always great. If automatic registration goes ahead, people might think that it applies to all elections. Voting should be kept as simple as possible. I appreciate that automatic registration is aiming to make it easier, but yeah, it could cause confusion if not communicated very well.”

“I think there’s certain members of the public who don’t want to understand, nor take the time to understand, the differences between UK and Welsh elections. So there will be confusion. But, I think we should put Welsh elections first. It’s only what the UK would do...”

“The knowledge of different elections among the public isn’t always great. If automatic registration goes ahead, people might think that it applies to all elections. Voting should be kept as simple as possible. I appreciate that automatic registration is aiming to make it easier, but yeah, it could cause confusion if not communicated very well.”

“The voting and registration process is difficult to understand for many people with learning disabilities, and indeed this could add confusion. The benefits seem to outweigh these concerns, provided that proposals and changes are provided accessibly to all voters, including in easy read.”

“Consistency is always useful - the least faff the better when it comes to voting so could UK Parl be persuaded to do the same.”

Question 11

How can these risks best be avoided?

24. The main theme which emerged from the responses to this question focused on the need for clear communication delivered via different mediums.

“Very strong comms campaign. Info available and made very clear at polling stations.”

“Clear communication via letter / email / social media / education.”

“Making it clear in correspondence, local authorities and the Electoral Commission should remind voters ahead of UK elections.”

“A coherent, jargon-free communication campaign, making use of different communication channels (social media, tv, letter etc) to ensure as many people as possible are aware of the differences (as people digest information in different ways).”

Question 12

The Welsh Government has said that if the Bill becomes law in Wales, it will pilot automatic registration with a view to rolling out the successful model. However, the Bill does not require Welsh Ministers to carry out a pilot and as such, they could choose to do so without piloting a scheme(s) first.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Welsh Government should test the successful model before it's rolled out.

25. 75% of respondents to this question strongly or somewhat agreed that the Welsh Government should test the successful model before it's rolled out. 10% said they strongly or somewhat disagreed, whilst a further 15% of respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing or selecting 'Don't know.'

Question 13

Are there any further comments you would like to share with us about the automatic registration of voters?

For example, is there anything that you think Welsh Government should be doing differently when it comes to the automatic registration of voters?

26. A variety of responses were received to this question, with no common theme emerging. A snapshot of those responses are below:-

“Go for it. It's long overdue and needs to happen to make Wales a modern and inclusive democracy. No need for tests, trials, or grand schemes - they're a waste of valuable time and money.”

“I think Welsh Government should put Welsh elections first, and go forward with automatic registration. Who knows, the UK might be encouraged to follow suit!”

“Please don't waste any more money. Spend it wisely - like repairing broken windows and equipment in schools.”

Demographic of survey respondents

Voting

27. 91% of respondents were registered to vote. 7% were not registered, whilst 2% preferred not to answer.

Location

28. 58% of respondents identified as being from South Wales, with 28% coming from North Wales and 14% coming from Mid and West Wales.

Gender

29. 54% of respondents identified as female, with 42% identifying as male. 2% selected 'Other', with a further 2% preferring not to answer.

Age

30. 64% of respondents were aged between 25 – 64, with 26% of respondents aged 24 and under. 10% of respondents were aged 65 and over.

Ethnicity

31. 89% of respondents to this question described themselves as 'White'. 4% of respondents described themselves as 'Mixed/multiple ethnic groups'. 2% of respondents described themselves as 'Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British, with 1% describing themselves as 'Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African'. 4% of respondents to this question preferred not to say.

Disability

32. 81% of respondents to this question did not consider themselves to have a disability. 17% of respondents did consider themselves to have a disability whilst 2% preferred not to say.