

Response from Colin Everett, Chair, WECB

I am replying in my current capacity as chair of the Wales Elections Coordination Board (WECB), and as an experienced Regional and Local Returning Officer. I have given advice based on experience and insight rather than on a personal and more subjective view. If I am silent on a specific point then I have no specific view to offer, noting that others may comment in more detail.

STV

- The minimum number of votes required should be one. Anything different will be alien to the electorate and is likely to lead to large numbers of rejected votes
- On the choice of vote transfer methods we do not currently have the systems for or the experience of operating electronic voting across the board. We are still piloting. We could not be certain that we would be in a state of readiness for the next Senedd elections so the Basic Gregory system would have to be the default for planning purposes
- I would question the grouping of candidates by party on the ballot paper. The long-standing convention is to list candidates in alphabetical order of their second name. Grouping in the way proposed could be argued to encourage 'block voting' by party when the personal decision the elector is asked to make is which candidate they choose to vote for and not which party specifically. Such a grouping system could be argued to work in disfavour of independent candidates as the ballot paper will be more dominated, visually, by the parties fielding the maximum number of candidates
- The determination of an order of candidate presentation by 'lot' would be a random system for an electoral system which is very ordered and precise. Again, there would be the risk of causing confusion for electors and this could lead to unnecessary questions being asked of polling station staff in busy periods, and elector error
- I support the use of the 'countback' system for the filling

Flexible List

- No specific comments as I would expect the recommendation of the Expert Panel for the adoption of the STV system to be favoured. However, my above comments on the design of the ballot paper and specifically the ordering of candidates might apply

MMP

- The MMP hybrid system is one with which the electoral community is very familiar. It gives a sound platform for future Assembly elections

Boundaries

- Neither of these two options is ideal. I have applied the following two basis tests to the optional systems (1) would the constituency area be recognisable and logical to the elector whom the successful candidates is elected to represent and (2) would implementation be administratively possible/convenient for the elections practitioners with a low risk of error. The first option would pass both tests, although may cause confusion and duplicity in the role of each elected MS post-election, whereas the second option would fail both tests and is likely to be highly complex administratively for elections administrators and parties/candidates alike
- The current constituency and regional boundary system is known and understood. It generally has a geographical and representational coherence and is broadly conterminous with local authority boundaries

Timetable

- There has been some significant learning from the process and the timetable for the unitary council local boundary reviews which preceded the coming 2022 local government elections. Ministerial commitments have been made for an improved and more timely boundary review system for local government in the future. These commitments should also apply to any review of Assembly constituencies. The completion of any reviews for statutory orders to be passed and published a minimum of 12 months ahead of a scheduled election date must be a requirement
- I would question the need for a full boundary review particularly given the importance of maintaining co-terminosity of constituencies with local authority boundary units as set out above

Resources and Planning

- Any change to electoral systems and processes requires planned change and additional work and resources – at both local authority and government levels. Once final decisions have been made we will be in a position to explore capacity and financial resource needs in more depth. I would ask that the Committee makes a recommendation that Welsh Government will commit to set aside the necessary resources which will flow from any decision for change as an open principle. Electronic voting systems would, for example, require major investment in technology infrastructure.