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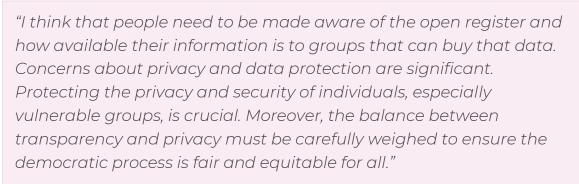
17.   The following quotes provide a snapshot of responses which referred to a need to protect vulnerable groups, with some addressing the specific challenges certain groups may encounter.

"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.