

Term limits for local councillors

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Medi 2016

Petitions Committee | 13 September 2016

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-706

Petition title: Keep our Councils Rejuvenated by Introducing a Fixed Term

Text of petition: I am proposing that in order to keep our councils and communities moving forward, elected cabinet and council members can only remain in post for a maximum of 2 terms (8years) within our local authorities. This will provide a continuous cycle of local representatives that will bring new ideas and enthusiasm to our communities. It will also provide an opportunity for Wales to develop a new generation of young politicians.

Background

The petition refers to introducing a 'fixed term' for local councillors, but the more commonly used expression in this context is 'term limits'. A term limit would restrict the number of terms a local councillor could serve, and therefore prevent them from standing for re-election after a prescribed period. Restrictions could also be placed on how long a Member could serve on a Council's executive. At present, there are no time limits.

Unlike some countries, notably the United States, term limits are not a familiar feature of political life in the UK.

It was proposed that Police and Crime Commissioners would only be permitted to serve a maximum of two terms in office, but this provision was removed from the legislation before it became law.

Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government's 2015 White Paper, [*Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People*](#) put forward proposals to limit the number of terms that local councillors could serve. The suggestion was a maximum of five terms. It also proposed limiting the length of time a Member could be part of any Council's executive to two terms.

The White Paper highlighted research that suggested term limits could potentially lead to a more diverse pool of candidates for election. However, the Welsh Government also acknowledged that the research was not conclusive, “not least that the ballot box gives the electorate the opportunity to impose their own term limits”.

The [summary of responses](#) to the consultation showed that while there was some support for the introduction of term limits, there was little consensus about what any limit should be. A total of 21 local authorities, and the WLGA, opposed the proposal for term limits. The summary went on to note:

For all of the suggested term limits there were two main arguments put forward to support respondents’ views. Firstly, it was suggested, any changes to term limits should apply to all levels of political representation across Wales. Secondly, it was argued, the evidence provided by the Welsh Government in the White Paper is insufficient basis to make such a change.

On 17 June 2015, the previous Minister announced in a [written statement](#) that he had decided not to proceed with the proposal.

National Assembly for Wales action

Assembly Members in the Fourth Assembly raised this issue in the context of the proposals in the 2015 Welsh Government consultation. In particular, Members queried why the proposals were restricted to local government, and whether they would indeed increase diversity within local government.

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