

Voting system for Welsh local government elections

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 17 Ionawr 2017

Petitions Committee | 17 January 2017

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-723

Petition title: Establish Proportional Representation Voting System for Welsh Local Council Elections.

We the undersigned call on the National Assembly for Wales to establish a proportional representation voting system for 22 Welsh council elections.

Background

Local councillors in Wales are elected using the First Past the Post (FPTP) System, as they are in England. Each electoral division (more often called a ward) can return one or a number of councillors.

Proponents of FPTP highlight that it provides a clear link between councillors and their electorate. Opponents highlight that FPTP rarely produces a result that reflects the overall view of the electorate and results in a high number of uncontested seats where there is only one candidate.

In 2002, a majority of the [Sunderland Commission](#) recommended introducing the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for local government elections. The Commission was established by the Welsh Government in June 2001 to examine and report on local government electoral arrangements in Wales. However, the minority view of that Commission was that STV would necessitate larger wards which would make councillors less accountable and less local. The minority view favoured retaining FPTP, but with single-member electoral divisions only.

Local councillors in Scotland have been elected using STV system since 2007. Councillors in Northern Ireland are also elected using STV.

Regional Members of the National Assembly for Wales are [elected](#) by a form of proportional representation known as the Additional Member System.

Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government is currently considering options for local government reform, although, thus far, this has not focused on changing the voting system. However, in his letter to the Committee dated 4 January 2017, the Cabinet Secretary suggests that enactment of the Wales Bill may provide the Welsh Government with additional scope to reform both voting and registration for local government elections. He states that, in due course, he intends to consult on a package of proposals, some of which may be piloted at local by-elections. The Cabinet Secretary's letter also casts some doubt over whether electoral reform in local government is currently a devolved matter.

National Assembly for Wales action

In the Third Assembly (2007–2011), Liberal Democrat Peter Black proposed a [Legislative Competence Order](#) that would have allowed the Assembly to legislate in respect of “The arrangements for the election of members of local authorities and the electoral system by which they are elected”. This was [debated](#) on 11 June 2008 by the Assembly and not given permission to proceed.

During [Stage 1 scrutiny](#) of the *Local Government Democracy (Wales) Bill* in February 2013, the Minister for Local Government and Communities stated that the Assembly does not have competence in terms of electoral reform.

[Amendments](#) to the *Local Government Bill* were tabled in June 2015, again by Liberal Democrat Peter Black, would have introduced the Single Transferrable Vote for local government elections. However, these amendments were defeated.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

This briefing was corrected on 18 January 2017 to remove a statement which suggested that the Alternative Vote electoral system is a form of proportional representation.