

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: 21st March 2024

Title: Single Transferable Vote

Purpose of the report: To consider the recently commenced powers for local authorities to vary their electoral system for County Council elections.

For: Decision

Cabinet Portfolio and Cabinet Member:

Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Democratic Services, Policy, Performance and People and Organisation

Introduction

All councillors in Wales are currently elected using a simple majority system, commonly known as first past the post (FPTP). Each Council will continue to use this method unless it decides to change to a system known as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) under the powers legislated in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act).

It should be noted that there are no provisions to change the voting system for Town and Community Council elections.

Changing the voting system

The Act sets out the steps (in sections 8 and 9) a local authority must take if it is minded to change its voting system. These sections commenced on 6 May 2022, immediately following the last round of local government elections. The steps required if the Council is minded to change the voting system are as follows:

- Before exercising the power to change the local authority must consult local government electors, community councils and any such persons as the local authority considers appropriate.
- A Special Meeting of Council would need to be convened, giving at least 21 days' notice. Such a change would require a resolution supported by a two-thirds majority of full Council.
- If a Council opts to change the voting system, it must use the new STV system for the next two rounds of ordinary elections, after which it could choose to revert back to FPTP.
- To change to STV for the next set of local government elections in 2027, a resolution to this effect must be made before 15 November 2024.
- If a decision is reached to change the voting system, the Council must notify Welsh Ministers and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

Schedule 1 of the Act outlines the provisions for a boundary review to take place, which requires that if a Council adopts STV, the number of councillors for each electoral ward is to be no less than 3, but no more than 6. There is therefore, a

significant element of work that would need to be undertaken to progress to the point of adopting the alternative voting system, and a steer is required from Council as to if this is a matter that it is wish to be pursued before committing resources to this project.

Full details of FPTP and STV are included in Appendix A.

Conclusion

Should Council wish to remain on the FPTP system then no further action is required at this stage by Council.

Should Council conclude they wish to consider the STV further then we will move to a period of public consultation before bringing a report back to a Special Council meeting, at which point Council will vote for whether to change the system to STV, but will need a two thirds majority to do so.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No. An Integrated Impact Assessment will be completed if Council decides it wishes to move to a period of consultation and a further report is presented at a Special Council meeting.

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term: N/A
Collaboration: N/A
Involvement: N/A
Prevention: N/A
Integration: N/A

Recommendation:

That Council either votes:

- a) **To remain on the First Past the Post system for County Council elections;**
- OR**
- b) **To undertake a public consultation on the possible change to the voting system for County Council elections to the Single Transferable Vote system.**

Reasons for decision:

To inform Members of the newly commenced powers in the Local Government and Elections (Wales Act 2021) (the 'Act'), for local authorities to change their voting system, in preparation for the next ordinary local government elections, scheduled for 2027; and to seek instruction from Council in respect of future voting arrangements.

Overview and Scrutiny:

Not applicable.

Policy Framework:

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Corporate Well-being Objectives:

Not applicable.

Finance and Procurement implications:

The implementation of new voting arrangements would require additional financial resources to enable the Council to implement this significant change in election arrangements.

Legal Implications:

A decision is required in order to meet legislative requirements.

Staffing implications:

There will be staffing implications if the decision is taken to move to a Single Transferable Vote system due to the increased time needed to complete vote counting.

Property / asset implications:

There will be property implications if the decision is taken to move to a Single Transferable Vote system due to the increased time needed to complete vote counting.

Risk(s):

The implementation of new voting arrangements will have financial and staffing implications for the Council.

Statutory Powers:

[Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) (sections 8 and 9).

Background Papers:

[DRAFT rules for local government \(principal council\) elections using the single transferable vote system.](#)

Appendices:

Appendix A – How does First Past the Post and Single Transferable Vote work?

Corporate Lead Officer:

Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

Reporting Officer:

Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

Date:

14th March 2024.

How does First Past The Post (FPTP) work?

- In a poll which uses FPTP where one representative is to be elected, voters place a mark (usually a cross) on the ballot paper next to the name of the candidate they wish to vote for.
- In a two-member ward, voters are instructed at the top of the ballot paper to vote for up to two candidates.
- A candidate is elected if they receive one or more votes than the other candidates. In a two member ward the two individuals who receive the most votes are elected.
- Counting the votes for a FPTP contest is a simple process when there is only one candidate to be elected.
- Counting the votes for a two-member ward requires a system which records the votes given on each ballot paper – ballot papers are counted once.
- There are currently 4 Wards in Ceredigion that are multi-member Wards i.e. Aberporth and Y Ferwig, Aberystwyth Penparcau, Aberystwyth Morfa a Glais and Beulah and Llangoedmor.

How does Single Transferrable Vote (STV) work?

- **Multi-member wards** - STV will require multi-member wards across the whole of the authority area. Welsh Government (WG) have stipulated that the number of councillors for each electoral ward is to be no less than three, but no more than 6.
- **STV rules** – The system of STV that is detailed below is in accordance with guidance issued by Welsh Government.
- **Ballot paper design** – candidates would appear on a STV ballot paper in alphabetical order according to surname, as is the case on the FPTP ballot paper. Voters are instructed at the top of the ballot paper to rank the candidates according to their order of preference.
- **Counting Votes** – there is no provision for electronic counting in the draft rules. Therefore, it is accepted that counting STV elections will be a lengthy process, with counts using STV taking up to 2 days to complete.
- **Quota (method of calculation)** – the method of counting is fundamental to any STV system. The method of counting provided for is the Droop quota (as used in elections in Northern Ireland and principal council elections in Scotland).

$$\text{Votes needed to win seat} = \frac{\text{number of valid ballot papers}}{\text{number of seats} + 1} + 1$$

- **Surplus transfer** – during the count, surplus ballots are transferred from the elected candidate pile to the next preference candidate, if the first choice candidate has votes in excess of the quota or has been eliminated.

When a candidate exceeds the quota, the surplus votes are examined to see if the next available preference candidate is still in the race (neither elected or eliminated). Ballot papers are transferred to the next available preference at a value which is calculated by taking the candidate's surplus and dividing it by the total number of ballot papers being transferred. This process continues until the appropriate number of candidates stand elected.

There is an additional step to ensure that the value of transferred votes is not greater than the value of the vote on the ballot paper when it was received by the candidate from whom it is now being transferred.

All calculations are done to 2 decimal places so are manageable for manual counting.

- **Exclusion of candidates** – if vacancies remain after the transfer process has taken place, the rules provide for the candidate with the lowest number of votes to be eliminated. The eliminated candidate's votes are then redistributed in stages.

The first stage involves the transfer of the excluded candidate's first preference votes. The Returning Officer examines the votes given to see if a next preference has been given, which is still available. Each ballot expressing a next available preference is transferred to the candidate for whom the preference is given, at a transfer value of 1.

- **Non-transferable ballot papers** – a ballot paper becomes non-transferable at the stage where the Returning Officer is unclear which candidate is next in the order of preference.
- **Last vacancies** – the draft rules provide for the filling of last vacancies which is intended to ensure that the returning office is not required to continue counting when it would be pointless to do so. For example, the rule provides that where the number of candidates still in the race is equal to the number of vacancies remaining, those candidates are treated as elected.
- **Recounts** – a crucial difference between the FPTP rules and the draft STV rules is the provision made for candidates or election agents to request a recount. Having to recount the entirety of the vote, meaning repeating every single stage, would be unreasonable. Therefore, where an election is conducted using STV, the provision is for a recount of that stage of the count only.