

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Special Council

Date of meeting: 14th November 2024

Title: Decision on whether to adopt the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system for Ceredigion County Council.

Purpose of the report: In accordance with Section 8 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, that the Council considers whether to adopt a Single Transferable Vote (STV) system for Ceredigion County Council.

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.

1. Background

Section 5 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 permits any Principal Council to choose between two Local Government voting systems for Principal Councils:

- Simple majority system ("first past the post or FPTP")
- Single Transferable Vote System ("STV")

This option is available to each of the 22 Principal Councils in Wales individually. The Explanatory Note to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill in Appendix 1 explains the legislative background. Following the Council's decision in March 2024 to hold a consultation on changing the voting system, this report is intended to bring this decision before the Council following the consultation.

2. STV System

STV is a preferential voting system and operates in multi-member constituencies. Voters list candidates in order of preference by marking 1, 2, 3 etc. against the names of the individual candidates on the ballot paper. Candidates must have a certain quota of votes in order to be elected.

The following summarises the STV system that would be adopted. It resembles the Northern Ireland Assembly system - the "Gregory" System.

- Voters express their choice by ranking candidates in order of preference for the available seats. Therefore, vote by numbering candidates according to the preference of the elector on the ballot paper.

- A "quota" is then established. This is based on dividing the number of valid ballot papers by the number of seats contested + 1. If a candidate receives a number of first preference votes equal or above the "quota" then they are elected.
- If all seats are not filled after the first phase, then the remaining votes of the successful candidates above the quota are apportioned and re-distributed according to second preference recorded on those papers. (A formula is applied in terms of counting the value of the votes that are transferred)
- If a combination of a candidate's first and second preference votes reaches the quota after this stage they are elected.
- If there are empty seats remaining the process is repeated using the remainder of the votes.
- There is a procedure for removing candidates who do not reach the quota and a procedure for electing the remaining candidates if there are empty seats remaining.

The Regulations, the Local Elections (Principal Areas) (Single Transferable Vote) (Wales) Rules 2023, already in force establish the detailed electoral arrangements for the conduct of elections through this system should any Council in Wales adopt the STV system.

3. What is the process for changing systems?

Unless the Council decides to change the system and adopt a STV system, a simple majority system will be used in Ceredigion County Council elections. Changing is the decision of the Council that cannot be delegated. Any Principal Council in Wales can do this. It is not dependent on the position or decision of any other Council. It can mean that one Council uses a current system of a simple majority, and the neighbouring Council uses a STV system.

This change is not open to Town and Community Councils which will continue with the current system regardless of the county decision. Specific steps need to be followed if an alternative system is to be determined.

Before a decision is made to change the system, a consultation must be held in accordance with the statutory requirements and the process followed and the results are reported in the following section. The Council agreed in March 2024 to consult with Ceredigion local government constituents and the Town and Community Councils only, which is the statutory requirement.

Following a consultation on the proposal, a special meeting of the Council must be called specifically for this decision only. 21 days' advance notice of the meeting must be given. In order to adopt a proposal to change the system, the number of members who vote in favour must be at least two thirds of the number of seats on the Council, namely 26/38.

The decision must be made before 15 November in the year that is three years before the election year, namely 15 November 2024 in this term.

If the system is changed it will not be possible to exercise the power to change again until 2 local government terms have elapsed. If it is decided to move to a STV system, the Welsh Ministers and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission must be notified in a specific form and timetable.

4. Consultation

Following the delay of the proposed programme due to the UK General Election, a broad consultation process was undertaken between 15th July 2024 and 6th September 2024 with the residents of Ceredigion and Town and Community Councils.

The survey was available online via the Council website and printed copies were available in all Council libraries. The consultation was also promoted by a press release as well as on the Council's social media channels (with a post fortnightly for the duration of the consultation period).

The findings of the consultation can be found in Appendix B.

To summarise the findings of the consultation:

- 475 responses were received;
- 67% supported STV;
- 30% supported FPTP;
- 3% had no preference on the type of voting system used in the future;
- Young respondents were more likely to support the change to the STV system compare to older age groups;
- 66% of respondents who live within the County supported STV;
- 100% of respondents residing outside of the County supported STV.

5. Boundary Review

Should the Council decide to adopt the STV system then specific legal action needs to be taken which is to formally inform the Welsh Ministers of the decision. This will result in a direction from the Minister to the Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales to undertake a review of the Electoral Arrangements for Ceredigion County Council and to set a date for the completion of the review. Council "Electoral Arrangements" are defined as

- (i) the number of councillors in the area
- (ii) the number, size and boundaries of wards
- (iii) the number of councillors for each ward
- (iv) the name of each ward.

The objective of the process will be to create new wards of between 3 and 6 members which are required for the implementation of the system. The Commission in accordance with the direction received will conduct a process similar to the previous electoral review in 2017-21.

According to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 the Commission, through a consultative process, must develop a model in accordance with the following requirements:

"1. (a) seek to ensure that the ratio of local government electors to the number of councillors of the principal council to be elected for the area under review is the same in each electoral ward of the council area, as close as it may be, and

(b) have regard to —

- (i) the desirability of setting boundaries for easily identifiable electoral wards and that they will remain so, and*
- (ii) the desirability of not breaking the local connection when setting boundaries for electoral wards.*

(2) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(a) consideration must be given to —

(a) any discrepancy between the number of local government electors and the number of persons eligible to be local government electors (as seen in relevant official statistics), and

(b) any change in the number or distribution of local government constituents in the area under review that is likely to occur in the five-year period commencing immediately after recommendations are made."

At the end of the process, the Commission will prepare a report to the Minister with recommendations and based on the report an order will be made formally changing the boundaries for the May 2027 election.

6. Resource Implications

From decision to adoption of STV, the main demand on resources regarding staff time would be working on the Electoral Arrangements review in the first instance and adapting and updating electoral IT systems to incorporate the new wards into registers and maps. A proportional representation system has been in place in Senedd Cymru elections and, therefore, this type of voting system is familiar to polling station staff.

Ideally, a STV system would use an electronic counting system. However, the Government acknowledges that such a system is very costly. Therefore, a STV system called the Simple Gregory Method is used which can be counted by hand.

However, the experience of counting by hand across the UK shows that the system is time-consuming and the counting process can take two days or more. There will also be a need for storage for ballot paper that may come in for further rounds of counting later on in the count.

Therefore, the main impact will be in the post-poll count. It is estimated that this would involve an additional cost on an election of around £45k for 2 days up to £56k for 2 ½ days (mainly staff and count centre hire) which will have to be funded from the Council budget. This figure has been calculated based on the 2022 Council Election costs.

This figure could be higher or lower depending on how long the Count process takes to complete.

7. Decision

Due to the provisions of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 there are statutory requirements regarding this decision.

- a. In order to adopt a Single Transferable Vote system, 26 (two-thirds) elected members must vote in favour of adoption.
- b. It is therefore necessary to decide on the specific question of whether or not the Council wants to adopt a Single Transferable Vote system.
- c. As a result, the statutory question is set forth in the report and this will require a specific vote to ensure a proper decision whether in favour or not.
- d. If 26 members do not vote in favour of adopting a Single Transferable Vote system then the regime will not change for the 2027 elections and an Electoral Arrangements review will not commence.

Therefore, the decision that the Council needs to make is whether it adopts a Single Transferable Vote system for Ceredigion County Council elections hereafter and until at least two elections have been held under this system (i.e. 2027 and 2032).

If there, the current voting simple majority system i.e. First Past the Post will remain in place.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

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

Yes; refer to Appendix C.

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term:	If the Council decides to move to Single Transferable Vote as its voting system for County Council elections, it will be in place for at least two elections held under this system (i.e. 2027 and 2032).
Collaboration:	We will work with partners to ensure that electors are aware of the changes to the voting system if the Council decides to change.
Involvement:	We will work with partners to ensure that electors are aware of the changes to the voting system if the Council decides to change.
Prevention:	There will be a significant promotion campaign undertaken especially if the Council decides to move to a Single Transferable Vote system. This will include press releases, social media, paid promotion and direct contact with specific groups through our engagement networks.
Integration:	Not applicable. This is a matter for Ceredigion County Council alone.

Recommendation(s):

For the Council to decide:

1. Whether or not to adopt a Single Transferable Vote system for Ceredigion County Council elections hereafter.

Reasons for decision:

To comply with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 in relation to the Council's voting system.

Overview and Scrutiny:

Not applicable

Policy Framework:

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

Corporate Well-being Objectives:

Not applicable

Finance and Procurement implications:

The counting of votes under the STV system will be more intense on resources than current arrangements. Part 7 of the report sets out the financial implication and the estimated additional costs.

The cost of running County Council Elections is borne wholly by Ceredigion County Council.

Legal Implications:

As set out in the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) (sections 8 and 9).

Staffing implications:

The counting of votes under the STV system will be more intense on resources than current arrangements. Part 7 of the report sets out the staffing implications and the estimated additional costs.

Property / asset implications:

The counting of votes under the STV system will be more intense on resources than current arrangements. Part 7 of the report sets out the property implications and the estimated additional costs.

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)

[The Regulations, the Local Elections \(Principal Areas\) \(Single Transferable Vote\) \(Wales\) Rules 2023](#)

Background Papers:

[Council report, 21st March 2024](#)

[Consultation page on the Council website.](#)

Appendices:

Appendix A: Explanatory Note – Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021;

Appendix B: Consultation feedback report;

Appendix C: Integrated Impact Assessment.

Corporate Lead Officer:

Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

Reporting Officer:

Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

Date:

4th October 2024