

Explanatory Note - Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Voting system - offer a choice: first past the post or single transferable vote

3.28 The first past the post system, also known as the "simple majority system", is the only voting system to be used to elect local councils in Wales since the introduction of elected local government at the end of the 19th century. This is also the system used to elect MPs, constituency Assembly Members and Welsh town and community councillors. Consequently, this is the voting system that Welsh electors are most familiar with.

3.29 Supporters of the 'First Past the Post' system argue that the voting and counting procedures are simple, familiar and relatively cheap, and there is an obvious link between the candidates' position after counting the votes and whether or not they are elected.

3.30 The White Paper - Local Government Reform: Resilience and Renewal' included a proposal to permit individual principal council to choose their voting system, of either the first past the post system or the single transferable vote system.

3.31 The single transferable vote is a voting by preference system, meaning that the electors must rank the candidates in order, using numbers. Electors may include all the available candidates or only those of their choosing. The single transferable vote is considered to be a "proportional representation" system. Typically, it leads to results that overall reflect the proportions of votes made for the different political parties, groups and independent candidates in individual electoral areas and in the election overall.

3.32 Every principal council election is a stand-alone election, restricted to the council area. It is appropriate for the council to determine its own voting system, choosing the option that reflects the needs of local people and communities.

3.33 The Bill provides that every principal council can decide for itself which voting system to use, the first past the post or the single transferable vote. Principal councils will continue to use the existing electoral system, until they decide to change. To change the voting system, it will need to be supported by at least two thirds of the total number of councillors on the council (be they in attendance and voting on the motion to change or not). If the council has considered and refused the proposal to change the voting system, the council cannot consider this matter again within the same electoral cycle.

3.34 A provision is made to prevent a principal council who has changed to a different voting system from returning to the old procedure until at least two elections have been held under that new system.

3.35 To change from one voting system to another, a new review of the council area's electoral arrangements would be required, and would be conducted by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.