



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

8TH MARCH 2023

SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES AND THE SERVICE
DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Council's instruction in respect of future local government election arrangements, in response to the newly commenced powers for local authorities to change their voting system for local elections, to the Single Transferable Vote ('STV').

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1 Discuss the option to change the voting system for local elections to the Single Transferable Vote; and
- 2.2 Subject to 2.1, determines, if there is support to initiate a consultation exercise conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, on a proposal to change the Council's voting system to the Single Transferable Vote.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to inform Members of the newly commenced powers in the Local Government & Elections (Wales Act 2021) (the 'Act'), for local authorities to change their voting system, in preparation for the next ordinary local government elections, currently scheduled for 2027.
- 3.2 Seek instruction from Council in respect of future voting arrangements.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Currently, for local elections, Councillors are elected to principal councils using a simple majority system commonly known as 'first past the post'. Councils will continue to use this method unless they resolve to change to a system known as the Single Transferable Vote (STV). As stated above the Act gave the Council the power to determine which system it should use for its elections.
- 4.2 Sections 8 and 9 of the Act sets out the procedure a local authority must follow if it was minded to change its voting system.
- 4.3 A link to the Act can be found [here](#).
- 4.4 Prior to the Act coming into force Welsh Government commissioned research exploring the introduction of the STV system in future local elections in Wales. A link to the full report can be found [here](#).
- 4.5 As a result of this new power it is therefore advised that Councils now determine if there is any appetite among political groups to further investigate STV, almost twelve months after the last ordinary local elections.

5. POWER TO CHANGE THE VOTING SYSTEM

- 5.1 A change to the Council's voting system would require a resolution supported by at least a two-thirds majority of the full council (i.e. 50 or more Members). Such a resolution must be considered at a meeting specially convened for the purpose, with written notice given to all Members at least 21 days before the meeting (beginning with the day on which the notice is given).
- 5.2 A resolution to change the voting system would need to be passed by 15 November in the year three years before the next ordinary election is due. To change the system for the next local government elections in 2027, this would be by 15 November 2024.
- 5.3 It is important to note that before a Council can exercise its power to change its voting system, it would have to consult locally. This would include people entitled to vote at the local government elections, each community council in the area and any other persons it considers

appropriate. It should be noted that, at this time, the election rules that would govern the conduct and operation of elections that use the STV system have not been made by Welsh Government and any consultation exercise could not commence until those rules have been made.

- 5.4 Councils opting to change their voting system would be required to use the new system for the next two rounds of ordinary elections. In the case of a by-election for a casual vacancy that arises in the period following the passing of resolution to change the voting system and the next ordinary local government elections, the voting method used at the previous ordinary election would be used.
- 5.5 After two rounds of ordinary elections, a Council could decide whether to return to the previous voting system.

6. BOUNDARY CHANGES

- 6.1 Following a resolution to change the voting method, the Council would have to notify Welsh Ministers and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission of the change.
- 6.2 Following notification, Welsh Ministers may direct the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales to conduct an initial review of the Council's boundaries. Welsh Ministers must consult the Commission before such a direction, and persons representing principal councils as the Welsh Ministers consider appropriate.
- 6.3 Provisions for initial reviews are set out in Schedule 1 of the Act, and includes a requirement that if a Council adopts STV, the number of councillors for each electoral ward is to be no less than three, but no more than six.

7. THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)

- 7.1 Welsh Government are currently developing the rules for council elections run using the STV system and will consult on these early in 2023. Therefore, the below process is only an illustration of how it may work.
- 7.2 Voters rank candidates in order of preference, by assigning a 1 next to their preferred candidate, a 2 next to their second preferred candidate,

and so on. Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they wish, or can vote for only one candidate.

- 7.3 Candidates must reach a quota. This is the minimum number of votes calculated according to the number of seats and votes cast.
- 7.4 Ballot papers are sorted into first preference votes. Candidates reaching the quota are immediately elected.
- 7.5 Surplus votes from candidates reaching the quota are reallocated to second preference candidates.
- 7.6 Votes from the candidate with the fewest first preference votes who do not reach the quota are eliminated. Their votes are reallocated to second preference candidates.
- 7.7 Following the reallocation of votes, candidates reaching the quota are in turn elected. Their surplus votes are then reallocated until all vacancies are filled.
- 7.8 Where no candidate reaches the quota, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and their votes transferred to the remaining candidates.
- 7.9 Counting votes using this method is complex and there is evidence that the number of spoilt votes increases in STV elections. Although it is more difficult to explain to electors how the system works, it allows more people's votes to count. Many STV elections are counted electronically, in Scotland for example. There would be a significant cost attributable to procuring an electronic counting system.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 8.1 There are no implications arising from the recommendations in this report at this time. Should Council determine to progress any changes to local election arrangements, a full equality and diversity impact screening exercise would be undertaken.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

10. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 10.1 Before exercising the power to change its voting system the local authority must consult local government electors, community councils and any other interested parties.
- 10.2 The Welsh Government has recently consulted upon draft statutory guidance to support this process of engagement.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 11.1 Members are advised that the implementation of new voting arrangements would require additional financial resources to enable Electoral, Legal & Democratic Services to implement this significant change in election arrangements.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 12.1 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

13. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 13.1 Consideration of the Council's voting arrangements support the national priorities contained within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to reform democracy in Wales, and the ambitions set out in the recent Welsh Government White Paper.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 This report seeks to ascertain the appetite of Council to utilise the new provisions provided within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, to review local election arrangements.
- 14.2 This report provides the opportunity for Council to reflect and consider the advantages and disadvantages of First-past-the-post and the STV voting arrangements and determine the most appropriate local arrangements.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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AND COMMUNICATIONS.**

ITEM: SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)

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and Communications*