



Cynulliad National  
Cenedlaethol Assembly for  
Cymru Wales

## Local Government and Public Services Committee



'Electoral Arrangements in Wales' scrutiny project

December 2006



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#### **Cover:**

left hand picture shows Committee Chair Ann Jones AM testing electronic voting equipment during the Committee's visit to Belgium. Photograph by Committee Member Michael German AM.

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## **Chair's Foreword**

One look at the recent findings of the Electoral Commission's research into public attitudes to Assembly elections is enough to explain why this report from the Assembly's Local Government and Public Services Committee is so timely and important. As people in Wales look towards Assembly elections next May, and the opportunity of increased legislative powers, it is worrying to see how young people are becoming increasingly disengaged from the electoral process. The Electoral Commission's research, "*Wales: poll position*", confirms that younger people are the least likely to vote in Assembly elections, or indeed in local or General elections. In the last Assembly elections in 2003, around 80 per cent of registered voters aged 18-34 did not use their vote. When the Committee visited Sweden and spoke to specialists in voter turnout across Europe their message was clear: if young people haven't voted by their third election, they never will. So if young people are so disengaged now, what hope is there for the future of democracy in Wales?

This scrutiny project has looked at electoral arrangements in Wales to try to identify the reasons why people are not engaging with the democratic process, and if possible to propose some solutions. Whilst we do not claim to have found any magic cure, we have explored some important factors affecting whether or not people vote, such as gaining the knowledge and skills to participate in registration and voting, access to polling places, the methods used to cast our vote, and how we target those groups who are least likely to participate in elections.

The results of the Committee's work were not all doom and gloom. We found that many people thought access for disabled people was improving, although we still have a long way to go. We discovered some examples of good practice in teaching democracy and politics in schools, and a general recognition that citizenship teaching and developing young people's 'political literacy' is an important aspect of education.

But we also compared experiences in other European countries and saw examples of much greater levels of political engagement. The Committee thinks that much more needs to be done to ensure that young people in Wales recognise the vital role they play in the democratic process and have the skills to participate fully. We hope that our recommendations will further the debate in this important area of our civic life, and ensure that future generations will play their full role in shaping the nation through the choices they make at the ballot box.

I am grateful to all those who gave evidence to the Committee and helped us with our deliberations on this important subject. We have put forward a number of recommendations, most of which will fall to the Welsh Assembly Government to respond. We hope that those recommendations will be given careful consideration and look forward to a response in advance of next May's Assembly elections.

**Ann Jones AM**

**Chair, Local Government and Public Services Committee**



# Members

## Local Government and Public Services Committee



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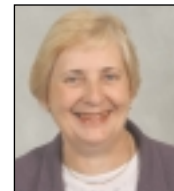
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## **Executive Summary**

The terms of reference for the Committee's scrutiny project on 'Electoral Arrangements in Wales' were to consider: the issues surrounding the arrangements for local government and National Assembly elections in Wales, in particular, voter registration, voter turnout, the participation of young people and bilingual voting; a range of measures used within other political systems to improve voter turnout, registration and the participation of young people and the extent to which they could be applied to elections in Wales; if any additional measures are required to ensure that voting arrangements in Wales are fully inclusive.

The Committee looked at the whole voting experience, from registration to access to polling stations and methods of voting. It explored issues of equality and inclusivity, including disability and language.

The Committee has made a total of 33 recommendations. Those about the voting experience relate to: the costs and capacity to deliver electoral services in Wales; co-ordination of work to promote voter registration and voting, in particular amongst certain target groups; using the Assembly's new powers to promote public awareness of the electoral system; promoting existing methods of voting and piloting new methods, in particular electronic voting and use of alternative polling venues; taking account of the needs of those with learning disabilities and delivery of electoral services in different languages.

The level of voter turnout, in particular by young people, was of particular concern to Members. The Committee compared voting experiences in Wales with those in other European countries including Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations about how young people in Wales are educated to develop political literacy. It wishes to see citizenship education in Wales delivered in a balanced and co-ordinated way that takes full account of the need to develop political understanding amongst young people, and to teach them about the roles, policies and positioning of political parties as well as political processes.

## Full list of recommendations

No.	RECOMMENDATION
1	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group co-ordinates all Wales voter registration and explores the scope for cost rationalisation and staff capacity.
2	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association explore how joined up delivery of public services, in the light of the Beecham Report and the Local Government Regionalisation agenda, can contribute to tackling cost and capacity issues for Electoral Registration Officers.
3	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers the long term implications for capacity to deliver individual registration as highlighted by evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA).
4	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group works with the AEA and Electoral Commission to co-ordinate promotional work on a national and/or regional basis for voter registration.
5	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group investigates the experiences of initiatives such as the Right to Vote project and assesses the feasibility of rolling out a programme to targeted groups across Wales.
6	We recommend that the Assembly makes full use of the powers provided for in Schedule 11 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 to promote registration for the Assembly elections in 2007 – in particular the fact that it is possible to register up to 11 days before polling day.
7	We recommend that the Assembly Commission to be set up after the Assembly election in 2007 makes full use of its powers under paragraphs 5 and 6 of Schedule 2 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 to promote registration for Assembly elections in the future.
8	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group takes steps to monitor public attitudes to the security of the postal voting system in Wales.
9	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group takes a lead in setting standards for postal voting packs that are simple and straightforward to use and use language that is accessible to the majority of people.
10	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers guidelines for advising people about changing their method of voting to ensure that they are simple and straightforward and there is adequate publicity.
11	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association encourage Welsh local authorities to apply to the UK Government to pilot methods of electronic voting.
12	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group takes steps to ensure that guidelines on access to polling stations are consistent and obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are made explicit in all guidance.
13	We recommend that any guidance for polling station staff should take account of the needs of voters with learning disabilities.

14	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group commissions an assessment of training needs for polling station staff across Wales on issues regarding access and identifies appropriate organisations and mechanisms for delivering training.
15	We recommend that targets are set for local authorities for the percentage of polling stations that are fully accessible to all abilities.
16	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers what mechanism could be created to ensure that any problems identified in polling station manager's reports are acted on and addressed as a matter of priority.
17	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association encourage Welsh local authorities to apply to the UK Government in order to participate in any pilot schemes involving the use of alternative venues for voting.
18	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group explores the scope for cost rationalisation and joined-up delivery of electoral services in Wales that will allow electoral administrators and returning officers to carry out their duties and responsibilities, including those introduced by the Electoral Administration Act 2006, effectively.
19	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers regional and nation-wide approaches to the promotion of voting by young people.
20	We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers rolling out targeted initiatives to encourage socially and economically excluded groups of young people to vote.
21	We recommend that the ongoing review of the curriculum, including the public consultation exercise, should pay particular attention to the need to develop political understanding amongst young people and to teach them about the roles, policies and positioning of political parties as well as political processes.
22	We recommend that guidance to schools on the teaching of 'political literacy' should specifically include teaching about political parties and young people's role in the democratic process as well as basic political concepts.
23	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government reviews guidance to senior school management and governors to ensure that the importance of promoting political literacy in the life of the school in a balanced and non-partisan manner is recognised and to encourage inviting voluntary, private and public service organisations, including political parties, into schools to facilitate debate amongst pupils.
24	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government takes a co-ordinated approach to the guidance it gives schools on the operation of school councils and on citizenship activities, to ensure that these are properly contributing to pupils' political understanding and appropriate links are being made between school council activities and other citizenship initiatives, such as inviting politicians into schools.
25	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government reviews its internal structures to ensure that a strategic co-ordinated approach is taken to the delivery of citizenship education, from curriculum

	development to teacher training and classroom activities.
26	We recommend that guidance and training should focus on ensuring that all pupils, regardless of their background, are encouraged equally to participate in school councils and other citizenship initiatives and that Estyn should monitor representation and participation from an equality perspective.
27	We recommend that measures are put in place to ensure that all secondary schools deliver Personal and Social Education (PSE) using specially trained and resourced teachers.
28	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government takes the lead in facilitating training of teachers in PSE, providing resource packs for such training and supporting teachers in the delivery of PSE.
29	We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government ensures that existing examples of good practice in citizenship and political education are adequately disseminated to all schools and youth groups in Wales.
30	We recommend that the Assembly Commission and local authorities develop initiatives that provide young people from different backgrounds with opportunities to shadow elected politicians from the Assembly and Local Government, and to participate in debates with politicians. Such initiatives should take account of existing good practice in Wales and elsewhere.
31	We recommend that it should be a requirement to provide bilingual support and advice to people through both the registration and voting process in all electoral areas of Wales. Where it is not possible to have bilingual staff present, people should be able to access personal advice in the language of their choice, for example via a freephone number.
32	We recommend that targeted support and advice in languages other than Welsh and English, through both the registration and voting process, should be provided in electoral areas in Wales according to need.
33	We recommend that continued efforts are made to improve the accessibility of all electoral material in Wales and to take full account of the needs of people with learning disabilities, limited literacy and those whose first language is not English or Welsh.

## **PART 1: Introduction and Background**

1.1 At its meeting on 9 March 2005 the Local Government and Public Services Committee agreed a terms of reference for its Scrutiny Project on Electoral Arrangements in Wales as follows:

- To consider the issues surrounding the arrangements for local government and National Assembly elections in Wales, in particular, voter registration, voter turnout, the participation of young people and bilingual voting.
- To consider a range of measures used within other political systems to improve voter turnout, registration and the participation of young people and the extent to which they could be applied to local government and National Assembly elections in Wales.
- To consider if any additional measures are required to ensure that voting arrangements in Wales are fully inclusive.
- To make recommendations.

1.2 The Committee's consultation was interested in people's views on the wider issues outside the Assembly's powers as well as in the detail of actions that can be taken by the Assembly.

1.3 The Committee received evidence from witnesses at several meetings (see Annex A for a full list). In addition Members of the Committee received evidence from witnesses on visits to The Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium in September 2005 and Sweden in April 2006.

1.4 At its meeting on 13 October 2005 the Committee decided to scrutinise the *Electoral Administration Bill* with a view to ensuring that the views of organisations in Wales directly affected by the Bill could be sent to the Standing Committee dealing with the Bill's passage through parliament. The interim report highlighted the issues that had come out of the evidence submitted at that time and the Committee's interim conclusions as a result.

1.5 The interim report on the project was published in November 2005 and was sent to the House of Commons Standing Committee dealing with the Electoral Administration Bill, all Welsh MPs and Welsh Members of the House of Lords.

1.6 The Committee also published a separate detailed report of its scrutiny of the *Electoral Administration Bill*. Members of the Committee met with peers in the House of Lords to discuss its recommended amendments in January 2006. On 11 January 2006 Committee Members put their name to a motion to call upon the UK Government to amend the Bill as recommended in that report. The motion under Standing Order No. 33.9 directed the First Minister to inform the UK Government of the proposed amendments and was unanimously approved in Plenary. A full chronology of the Committee's scrutiny of the Electoral Administration Bill and a link to its report is at Annex E.

1.7 During the Committee's scrutiny of the Electoral Administration Bill, concerns were also raised that insufficient consideration had been given to the additional cost in Wales for translation. In their report, the committee proposed that adequate funding be put in place for the implementation of the provision in the Bill and that the need for bilingualism in Wales needed to be acknowledged. The Minister reported to the Committee that her officials had held discussions with the Department for Constitutional Affairs, who indicated that no further funding was available.

1.8 The Committee concluded in its interim report of the scrutiny project that changes were needed to several aspects of the way in which our electoral system operates, but that these changes needed to be well considered and within a time frame allowing for carefully crafted, well thought out proposals.

1.9 This final report develops on the interim conclusions reached in that report, taking account of the results of consultation with local authorities, community councils and other interested organisations between June and September 2006, and further evidence taken in autumn 2006.

## ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE AND LEGISLATION IN WALES

1.10 There are five sets of elections which take place in Wales, to the following institutions:

- European Parliament
- UK Parliament
- National Assembly for Wales
- County and county borough councils (Local Elections)
- Town and community councils (Local Elections).

1.11 There is no single body or organisation responsible for elections in Wales but a number of different bodies and institutions with varying responsibilities at different levels of Government.

### Central Government

1.12 The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) is responsible for the legislative framework for UK Parliamentary elections and European Parliamentary elections. It also co-ordinates policy on UK-wide electoral matters. It is responsible for the key pieces of UK electoral legislation such as the *Representation of the People Act 1983* (RPA 1983)<sup>1</sup>; the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (PPERA 2000) and the recent *Electoral Administration Act 2006*.

1.13 The *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (PPERA) established the Electoral Commission and gave it, amongst others, the duty of reporting on elections to the European and UK Parliaments and the devolved administrations. It was also tasked with keeping electoral procedures under review and with the giving of advice on electoral matters. It has a further duty to provide education about electoral and democratic systems.

1.14 The Commission's Wales Office is responsible for delivering the corporate aims of the Commission in the context of Wales.<sup>2</sup> It produces a statutory report on the conduct of Assembly Elections and General Elections in Wales. In 2004 it also produced a report on the Local Elections at the request of the National Assembly.

### Local Elections

1.15 The DCA also has responsibility for the conduct of council elections, both at county and town and community level in Wales. The National Assembly for Wales, does, however, have certain limited powers on local elections. The *Local Government Act 2000* provides the Assembly with a

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<sup>1</sup> The *Representation of the People Act 1918* (1918 RPA) was consolidated into the 1948 RPA, which was again consolidated by the RPA 1983. There has been no consolidation since then, despite RPAs in 1985, 1989, 2000 and several other enactments changing electoral law. There is a series of regulations made under the RPA 1983 which apply detailed election rules to the various types of elections.

<sup>2</sup> Electoral Commission, Submission to the Committee on Standards in Public Life on the work of the Electoral Commission in Wales, June 2006.

power to vary the existing scheme of elections to county councils. This means that the Assembly could decide that county councillors in Wales would no longer all be elected on the same day but instead would be elected in halves, every two years, or in thirds, with elections held in three out of every four years. In each case, the term of office would remain as four years.

1.16 The *Local Government Act 2000* also enabled the Assembly to change the year in which local elections (both at county and community level) are held. This power was used to delay council elections due in May 2003, to May 2004, in order to avoid the cycle of local elections in Wales coinciding in perpetuity with those of the Assembly.<sup>3</sup>

### **Assembly Elections**

1.17 Elections to the Assembly in 1999 and 2003 were conducted in accordance with the *Government of Wales Act 1998* and were largely the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales. The 1998 Act set out when elections should be held and how Members are elected. It also enabled the Secretary of State to make an order governing the detail of the conduct of the elections. The current version of this is *The National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) Order 2003*.

1.18 The Order covers the detail of the Assembly election procedures, including the manner of voting, the organisation of polling stations, the duties of returning officers, the organisation of election campaigns and legal proceedings in the event of a challenge.

1.19 The *Government of Wales Act 2006* has superceded the 1998 Act and introduced some changes to the conduct of elections. It provides for the Secretary of State to make Orders allowing for the conduct of Extraordinary General Elections. Schedule 2 of the Act also provides for the Assembly Commission that will be formed after Assembly elections in May 2007 to promote public awareness of the election system and devolved government, either directly or by financial support for the Electoral Commission. Transitional arrangements set out in Schedule 11 of the Act mean that in practice the existing Assembly can exercise these powers. A new Order will be made under section 13 of the Act, revoking and replacing *The National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) Order 2003*.

1.20 An all Wales Election Planning Group has been operational since September 2005. This was set up by the Welsh Assembly Government in order to provide a strategic overview of electoral issues in Wales. It is made up of representatives of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), the Electoral Commission, the Wales Office, the UK Department of Constitutional Affairs, a representative of Returning Officers, Assembly Government officials and officials from the four main political parties in Wales. It meets on a quarterly basis

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<sup>3</sup> Local Government & Public Services Committee, *Electoral Arrangements in Wales*, LGPS 04-05 (p.4), 20 April 2005.



## **Funding**

1.21 The DCA is responsible for funding UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections. The National Assembly for Wales has delegated powers in relation to meeting the costs of Returning Officers in conducting Assembly elections and the cost recovery scheme, which is specified in the *Returning Officers (Fees and Charges) Order*. The Assembly is also responsible for the local government funding settlement in Wales, which includes funds for electoral services.

## ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS IN WALES

### Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers

1.22 Section 8 of the RPA 1983 requires Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to be appointed in order to register electors. The Act further states:

In Wales, the council of every county or county borough shall appoint an officer of the council to be registration officer for any constituency or part of a constituency coterminous with or situated in the area of the council.

1.23 The historic origins of the “returning officer” have been explained by Roger Morris and David Monks in their handbook *Running Elections 2005*:

Through statutes and Parliamentary and constitutional procedures, the Crown dissolves and summons Parliaments. A writ – the term still survives here despite its abolition in everyday legal use – is issued as an instruction to officials acting locally to “return” (hence “returning officer”) the writ with the names (sic) of the elected candidate on it.<sup>4</sup>

1.24 Returning officers are appointed separately for different elections. For Parliamentary elections the returning officer is appointed by the prescribed local authority for all, or a substantial part of each constituency concerned. It is a ceremonial role filled by the Chair of the local authority. The substantive duties of electoral administration are carried out by the acting returning officers (i.e. the EROs).<sup>5</sup>

1.25 The *National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People Order) 2006* will prescribe returning officers for Assembly constituencies and regions for the 2007 Elections.

1.26 The council also appoints returning officers for local elections.

1.27 For European elections the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs prescribes a Parliamentary constituency acting returning officer to be the returning officer for a European election region.<sup>6</sup>

### Voter Registration

1.28 Electoral registration is the compiling and keeping of the electoral register. EROs are required to prepare and publish a register of electors for their area each year and maintain it throughout the year. It is their statutory duty to include the names of everyone who appears to them to be eligible, taking reasonable steps to obtain the required information. A canvass form is sent to each household in the UK every autumn for completion and return by

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<sup>4</sup> R Morris and D Monks, *Running Elections 2005*, SOLACE Enterprises, 2005. p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Acting Returning Officers are the Electoral Registration Officers as appointed under the *Representation of the People Act 1983* s.8. Usually these are the Chief Executive of the Local Authority.

<sup>6</sup> *European Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officer) Order 2004* SI No. 1056

the householder. The form asks for the details of all those eligible to vote (or eligible to vote in the near future) who are resident on 15 October. Since February 2001 the introduction of a rolling register has provided a voluntary means by which an individual can amend his or her registration details.

1.29 The Electoral Registration Officer is required to publish two versions of the Register of Electors. The 'full' version lists everyone who is entitled to vote. Access to this version is restricted by law and only certain people or organisations are allowed to use it, and only for specific purposes. The 'edited' version of the Register leaves out the names and addresses of those electors that have asked to be omitted from that version. The edited version can be purchased by anyone and can be used for any purpose.

1.30 Although registration is not in itself compulsory, an ERO has the power to require information for the purposes of maintaining the Register of Electors. A penalty for failing to complete and return the electoral registration form or for giving false information was first imposed in 1918 and extended to include rolling registration in 2006. The current penalty for this offence is a fine not exceeding £1,000. Prosecution is very rare.

1.31 Once compiled the Register allows the ERO to send out polling cards prior to polling day as well as provide lists of eligible voters to polling stations.

### **The Election**

1.32 Prior to polling day the returning officer has a range of duties that include identifying and securing suitable locations for polling stations and dealing with the submission of nomination papers so that those submitted comply with the rules so that they can be judged as valid.

1.33 The returning officer can appoint deputies and most local authorities will have an Electoral Services Unit with a small permanent staff but the returning officer will need to appoint additional staff for the election. This will include presiding officers and poll clerks for each polling station and staff to count the votes on polling day.

1.34 After the election the returning officer receives the returns of candidates' expenses.

### **Electoral Administration Act 2006**

1.35 The new *Electoral Administration Act 2006* has introduced a number of changes regarding access to registration, postal votes, and voting on polling day, including the introduction of a framework for the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) and provided for changes to the administration of elections. It also introduced measures to improve security and transparency and introduced a new regime for regulation of loans to political parties. The Act applies to Wales, England and Scotland, although secondary legislation made under the Act is made separately for Scotland.

## Electoral Administration in other countries

1.36 Electoral administrative arrangements in different countries tend to be distinguished by whether an Electoral Management Body (EMB) exists which is independent from Government; whether staff are permanent and professionalised and a differing balance between local and central roles in electoral administration.<sup>7</sup>

1.37 The Committee met with officials involved with electoral administration in Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium. All these countries are parliamentary democracies that use a form of proportional representation for elections.

1.38 In the Netherlands the Committee visited and received presentations from the Central Electoral Council (*the Kiesraad*) which acts as the central electoral committee for elections to the Netherlands Parliament and the European Parliament (provincial and local committees exist for those elections). The municipal authorities (not the Electoral Council) are responsible for the organisation of all elections in their municipality. Acting as central polling station, the Electoral Council sends the official report of the results to the Chamber of Parliament for which the elections take place.

1.39 In Denmark and Belgium the Election Unit is located in the Ministry of Interior. In Denmark the Electoral Unit is responsible for the conduct of national elections and referendums. In Belgium it provides guidelines and administrative support and the elections are organised locally.

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<sup>7</sup> ACE (Administration & Costs of Elections Project), Electoral Knowledge Network.

## **PART 2: CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES**

### **2.1 VOTER REGISTRATION**

2.1.1 As outlined in Part 1, the scrutiny project overlapped with the passage of the *Electoral Administration Act 2006* through Parliament and the Committee took evidence on the proposals in the Act and produced a report. The Act aimed, in part, to improve the accuracy of the register and to tackle potential registration fraud and contains some key provisions relating to voter registration:

- The creation of a Co-ordinated Online Register of Electors (CORE) which will merge or link the electoral rolls managed by all UK local authorities
- Performance Indicators for EROs
- A new duty on electoral registration officers (EROS) to carry out necessary steps to maintain the register
- A new registration offence of supplying false information in connection with registration
- Later date for registration – allowing people to register to vote up to 11 days before the close of poll and during campaigns
- Power to EROs to promote participation

2.1.2 The two latter provisions came into force on 11 September 2006 in time for the 2006 Annual Canvass.

2.1.3 The UK Government did not include individual registration in the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*, although key bodies such as the Electoral Commission<sup>8</sup> and the Constitutional and ODPM House of Commons Select Committees<sup>9</sup> are in support of it and several amendments were put down during its passage through Parliament. However, the Committee heard a substantial amount of evidence on the subject.

#### **Maintaining the Register**

2.1.4 If you are not registered you are not entitled to vote in elections. As a recent article by the Electoral Commission states:

“Electoral registration is the gateway to voting: people cannot vote at elections in the UK if their name is not on the register. It is the key building block for the administration of elections and will continue to be so. Furthermore, turnout figures at UK elections – increasingly an important barometer of the health of our democracy – are derived from registered electorate figures and with significant under-registration these might be, in effect, overplaying participation.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Electoral Commission, *Understanding Electoral Registration*, September 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Constitutional Affairs and ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committees, House of Commons, First Joint report of Session 2004–5 (2005) *Electoral registration*, HMSO, London.

<sup>10</sup> B Marshall & D Stewart (Electoral Commission), “Electoral Administration – Time for a change”, *Political Quarterly*, 76 (4), October- December 2005.

2.1.5 People failing to complete voter registration forms as required may be fined but in practice very few prosecutions are undertaken.<sup>11</sup> In his evidence to the Committee, the Chief Returning Officer for Wales, Bryn Parry-Jones said that “the system of voter registration is the keystone for running a good election” and that he and his colleagues “spend a lot of time seeking to ensure that we have as good an electoral register as possible”.<sup>12</sup>

2.1.6 However, the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) queried the value of pouring resources into registering people who are unlikely to use their vote.

“There are currently a considerable number of individuals who have no interest in the electoral process, and never want to vote. The resources expended in persuading these individuals to register are out of all proportion to the benefits of including in the register for a service they have no desire to use.”<sup>13</sup>

2.1.7 Roger Morris, a former Returning Officer argued that “prosecution (or any other penalty) will probably be counter-productive, as someone fined is unlikely to be a regular or willing voter”. Most respondents to the Committee’s consultation felt that education and publicity were much more valuable in encouraging registration than prosecution.<sup>14</sup>

2.1.8 The Electoral Commission noted that where intentional fraud arises, prosecution should follow. However, there will always be those who fail to supply information or do so incorrectly and these will often be the more vulnerable members of society. Therefore, prosecution would not be appropriate.

2.1.9 The AEA also drew attention to capacity problems in terms of maintaining the Register:

“Electoral registration is with each individual authority at the moment. We put an awful lot of effort into it, but, as someone said this morning, we are still seen as cinderella groups within council authorities. Most electoral services departments consist merely of two or three staff.”<sup>15</sup>

2.1.10 This view was supported by Kay Jenkins of the Electoral Commission who referred to survey work undertaken by the Commission:

“It is an issue not only of the number of bodies that you have to do the job, but of the structure within local authorities for supporting electoral services. It is often one person operating on their own, who has some additional staff around election time. Then there is a gap between that and the returning officer, who is a busy chief executive, and who only

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<sup>11</sup> HofC, Research Note SN/PC/00954, *Compulsory Voting*, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Bryn Parry-Jones, Chief Returning Officer for Wales, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 11 May 2005..

<sup>13</sup> AEA, Written Evidence on Voter Registration, LGPS 04-05(p5b)

<sup>14</sup> Analysis of Responses

<sup>15</sup> Bob Screen, AEA, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 21 September 2006.

comes in at election time. A management structure, which would bring a professional approach to delivering electoral services, is often lacking.”<sup>16</sup>

2.1.11 The Committee is of the view that in order to ensure that all those who are entitled to vote get to vote, it is important that electoral registers are kept up to date and are as accurate as possible. On the other hand, the Committee has noted the points made by the AEA about proportionality in terms of resources expended and the constraints on the capacity of Local Authority Electoral Services departments. The Committee also heard detailed evidence on this from the AEA, the WLGA and the Electoral Commission in the course of taking evidence to inform its scrutiny of the *Electoral Administration Bill*.

### **Householder versus Individual registration**

2.1.12 Electoral registration in the United Kingdom has been historically conducted on a household basis. Under this system, one person in each household, traditionally known as the "Head of Household" but now officially "the occupier", is required to complete an annual form, listing all those eligible, and those soon to become eligible, to vote at that address as of 15 October that year (the "Annual Canvass"). Since the introduction of "rolling" registration in 2001, electors residing in England, Wales and Scotland have had the opportunity to add their own individual names to the register at other times. Since 2002 Northern Ireland has operated a single system of individual registration. The rationale for making the change there was to strengthen security and combat fraud.

2.1.13 The Committee heard various views expressed about a move from householder to individual registration. Roger Morris outlined how public perceptions were underlining the need for change in methods of registration:

“The old system [*of household registration*] was tried and tested; it worked well for a long time and was well understood, but it was paper based and had limitations in terms of the trustworthiness of the head of the household responding appropriately and so forth.”<sup>17</sup>

2.1.14 A move from householder to individual registration would be likely to increase the cost of the canvass, especially if penalty for failure to comply with the request for information is not seen as a real and effective mechanism to encourage individuals to participate. It could also lead to a less accurate register if the percentage of returns is low. Also, household registration provides a means by which individuals with literacy or other disadvantages can be registered.

2.1.15 A move towards individual registration would require a decision to be made about the basis for individual registration. For example, should it be address-based or on personal criteria such as National Insurance (NI) number or birth date? In evidence submitted to the House of Commons Committees' inquiry SOLACE argued that National

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<sup>16</sup> Kay Jenkins, Electoral Commission, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 17 November 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Morris, Oral Evidence to Committee, 20 April 2005.

Insurance (NI) numbers were an attractive solution because most people have an NI number and in a mobile society an address-based system is problematic. However, the Pollen shop and Scope Cymru told the Committee that the requirement to supply a National Insurance number would create a barrier for many people.<sup>18</sup>

2.1.16 The AEA thought that “*the bandwagon towards individual registration is almost inevitable*” and that it would do a lot towards addressing concerns about fraud. Nevertheless, they expressed concerns about the current capacity of Local Authorities to deliver it and that if it was to be delivered effectively more funding would have to be forthcoming. The challenge for administrators was summed up:

“The concern that we have as administrators is around the practicalities of moving to a system whereby one has to issue forms to possibly every individual and to chase every individual. We could end up back in a poll-tax scenario. Many of us, as practitioners, would favour individual registration, but it remaining on the single household form, so that on that form everybody is required to sign, and provide their identifier and so on. For us as practitioners, households are far easier to chase up than individuals.”<sup>19</sup>

2.1.17 Scope Cymru and the Pollen Shop highlighted the risk of hard to reach groups being missed if individual registration was introduced.

“Overall registration of a number of groups will be reduced if individual registration is introduced without care. These include young people, especially those living in houses of multiple occupation, people with low literacy, people who do not speak English as a first language, older people and people with learning difficulties. These groups will have to be directly targeted with specific voter registration campaigns. The National Assembly could take a lead in starting this process now.”

2.1.18 Asked for their views on individual registration and security, most respondents to the consultation were opposed to individual registration on the grounds that it would lower turnout and prove confusing for electors. However, there was a significant recognition that it could improve security. This reflected views expressed in Parliament during the passage of the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*. The Electoral Commission reiterated its support for individual registration and was supported by the submission from CEWC Cymru. The point was made that while registration had dipped when individual registration was introduced in Northern Ireland, the accuracy of the register had increased and now the numbers registering had increased again.

2.1.19 Although this was not accepted by the UK Government for the recent Act, there is widespread support for its introduction amongst key stakeholders and it is possible that the UK Government may reconsider its position in the future.

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<sup>18</sup> Pollen Shop and Scope, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 8 June 2005.

<sup>19</sup> AEA, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 21 September 2005.



2.1.20 The Committee is of the view that individual registration is the way forward and hopes that the evidence it has gathered may help to influence moves in that direction.

### **International Comparisons**

2.1.21 A key contrast between the UK and the countries visited is the way in which voters are registered. In all three countries visited voter registration is linked to the civil registry or a national citizens' registry. The Committee saw examples of the automatic registration of all electors when they reach polling age. This was done by different means in each country, but each was based on information which is readily available in this country (such as date of birth, address, unique number allocated at birth for social security). It is then up to individual citizens to inform their local authority of any change of address.

2.1.22 The Committee was very impressed with the systems in place in the countries visited and that the existence of a civil registry provides a simple and reliable basis for automatic voter registration.<sup>20</sup> The consultation paper asked whether automatic registration should be introduced in the UK. Most respondents were positive about the benefits of automatic registration in principle but a number raised questions about the practicality of its introduction in the short term.

Roger Morris stated:

“Automatic registration presupposes the existence of linked systems not currently operating in the UK. In other countries where the tradition has been different it clearly works well. At a time, however, when major difficulties are being signalled with identity cards and other large-scale linked IT systems, it is difficult to see how automatic registration could be quickly and relatively inexpensively introduced. “

2.1.23 The Electoral Commission was equally cautious stating that: “automatic registration tends to feature in countries where there is a national citizens register. The commission believes that better sharing of data would assist the registration process in Britain”.

### **Promoting Registration**

2.1.24 The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* establishes a new duty on EROs to take steps to register eligible electors.

2.1.25 The Committee heard evidence about activities undertaken by Local Authorities and other bodies such as the Electoral Commission in promoting electoral registration. Much of this was in the context of encouraging young people and BME people to register which is discussed elsewhere in this report. However, some general issues relating to promotional activity emerged.

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<sup>20</sup> LGPS Committee Report on Scrutiny of the Electoral Administration Bill, 2006.

2.1.26 The AEA highlighted a lack of co-ordination in terms of promotional activities by Local Authorities.

“A problem that I think that we have with local authorities is that it is down to individual local authorities, which say, ‘We will do our own little thing, and we will pick on little schemes’. Caerphilly, for instance, will be looking at the local democracy week. We have encouraged five members to go on the ‘I’m a councillor, Get me out of here’ event. We can look at that and engage the children to get involved and debate online, and others may do something else. I do not think that there is a co-ordinated approach.”<sup>21</sup>

2.1.27 It further stated, in written evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life in July 2006:

“AEA Wales has developed over the last few years to advance the promotion of best practice and build on the efforts of the AEA Nationally. There is still much work to be done however and many different approaches throughout Wales to the task at hand. Whilst it has to be recognised that there is not a one size fits all solution (rural Powys has different problems to Cardiff City) there is a need to share more good practice and to work collaboratively. More recently members of AEA Wales (South Wales East and Central) have organised and agreed a joint publicity campaign which has been extended to members in North Wales and training sessions will be arranged at branch level. This concept should be extended to look at issues such as procurement and developing standardised forms if not all Wales certainly at a regional level.”

2.1.28 Naz Malik of AWEMA told the Committee of a successful technique employed by the Right to Vote project through which AWEMA worked with the councils in Newport, Cardiff and Swansea.

“I remember that, particularly in Swansea, within a matter of three or four weeks, we got 300 people on to the vote register, and that was done without really trying. We started to explain the benefits of registering your right to vote, and we said that one of the benefits was that you could not get any credit or open a bank account without doing so. Those two incentives were enough for people to get their name on the register. We achieved that, but what we really need to achieve is to explain to people the rights and responsibilities that this carries with it.”

He did, however, stress that this approach was both “labour-intensive and resource-intensive”.<sup>22</sup>

2.1.29 The Committee wishes to see concerted efforts to promote voter registration in a non-partisan manner and welcomes the increased powers for the Assembly Commission to participate in promotional work.

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<sup>21</sup> AEA, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 21 September 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Naz Malik, AWEMA, Oral Evidence to the Committee, 21 September 2005.

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group co-ordinates all Wales voter registration and explores the scope for cost rationalisation and staff capacity.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Local Government Association explore how joined up delivery of public services, in the light of the Beecham Report and the Local Government Regionalisation agenda, can contribute to tackling cost and capacity issues for Electoral Registration Officers.**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers the long term implications for capacity to deliver individual registration as highlighted by evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA).**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group works with the AEA and Electoral Commission to co-ordinate promotional work on a national and/or regional basis for voter registration.**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group investigates the experiences of initiatives such as the Right to Vote project and assesses the feasibility of rolling a programme out to targeted groups across Wales.**

**We recommend that the Assembly makes full use of the powers provided for in Schedule 11 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 to promote registration for the Assembly elections in 2007 – in particular the fact that it is possible to register up to 11 days before polling day.**

**We recommend that the Assembly Commission to be set up after the Assembly election in 2007 makes full use of its powers under paragraphs 5 and 6 of Schedule 2 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 to promote registration for Assembly elections in the future.**

## **2.2 THE VOTING EXPERIENCE**

### **Improving turnout**

2.2.1 Falling turnout is an issue of great concern to the Committee and to witnesses who gave evidence. The Committee explored a number of factors that might affect turnout, including encouraging registration, access to voting, methods of voting, and knowledge about the democratic process.

2.2.2 In his evidence to the Committee Gwilym Morris of the Pollen Shop stated:

“With regard to turnout, we have raised several issues and concerns, and we think that turnout is dependent on the accessibility and usability of an election. Some work that we are doing currently for the Electoral Commission will again show how friendly a place groups of young people and those with low literacy skills feel a polling station is and whether they think it an intimidating place to go to with official documentation and how that may prevent them from voting. We have also found quite a bit of evidence that those issues also reflect the experiences of older people. As people get older, they become more intimidated by very official buildings, especially those that are just ad hoc buildings. They are not like a council building that can be accessible. In Wales, especially with regard to the turnout for Assembly elections, you will have to think about that kind of thing. The other issue we have found is how relatively important people think the election is. That is at a national level, at a Welsh level, but it is also at a community level, in terms of whether they see the Assembly Members and the Assembly working for them. Your role in terms of voter engagement, as politicians, is really important in that regard. If your constituents think that you are important, and the job that you do is important, they will vote for you. That sounds obvious, but we have found some direct evidence of that.”

### **Postal voting**

2.2.3 Early in the scrutiny project the oral evidence taken regarding turnout focussed on the increase in postal voting, as a result of removing restrictions and the all postal voting pilots held in England in 2004. A number of key issues about the system emerged, notably how to balance improved turnout against issues of security. Roger Morris, who had presided over an all postal voting pilot in the 2004 European Elections in the East Midlands of England, stressed that maintaining the ‘confidence and intelligibility factor’ was essential in getting people to vote and the complexity of the voting packs and instructions in 2004 had not been helpful:

“When you are confronted with a slab of instructions, you think to yourself, ‘Oh my goodness, there is a lot to this, I do not have time, and I will do it later’. In fact, all it really needed to say was, ‘Put a cross like you always do, put it in the envelope and shove it in the box’.”

2.2.4 In 2004 the Electoral Commission recommended to the UK Government that all postal ballots should not be introduced for statutory UK elections.

Evidence from other sources, including the Chief Returning Officer for Wales, Bryn Parry Jones, pointed to a growing popularity in postal voting amongst the public but also a desire to keep the option of voting in person and to change methods of voting if desired.

2.2.5 When the Committee consulted on postal voting there was very strong opposition to the proposition of an all postal vote for elections, the principal reasons given being the unreliability of the postal service and concerns about security and the danger of abuse. Some respondents stressed the importance of going to vote as an important civic duty and community activity.

2.2.6 The security of postal voting has become a major concern following some high profile prosecutions after the 2004 local elections in England. The Electoral Commission has found that these concerns have centred on the scope for coercion or undue influence during the completion of ballot papers. Most allegations received by returning officers and police related either to voters being coerced to vote a certain way, or to voters being coerced into handing over their uncompleted ballot paper for completion by someone else. There is also concern over the integrity of the electoral register.<sup>23</sup>

2.2.7 In his evidence to the Committee the Chief Returning Officer for Wales stated:

“There are issues with regard to postal voting.... concerning whether it is possible to introduce a postal-voting system whereby signatures can be checked. That is either signatures on the electoral registration form, the application for postal voting or the declaration form.

On a practical basis, that will be possible only if there is investment in signature recognition machines. From a practical point of view, given the volume of paper that is being handled, there is no way in which any sort of manual check between one form and another would be possible at the time when staff are dealing with an election. We have many hundreds of people per constituency dealing with elections as it is. The process, the timescales that are set, and the expertise that would be necessary to make a judgement on matching one signature to another do not make that a practical proposition without investment.”

2.2.8 The requirement for ‘personal identifiers’, i.e. a voter’s date of birth and signature, is included in the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*, and regulations are being passed to set out the procedure for the collection of personal identifiers for existing and new postal voters. The *Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2006* specify that returning officers must check a minimum of 20% of personal identifiers at elections.

2.2.9 The Electoral Commission recognises that the 20% minimum level has been introduced for practical reasons, but believes that the goal should be

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<sup>23</sup> Electoral Commission, *Delivering Democracy*, 2004 (a)  
[http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/files/dms/DeliveringDemocracyfinalcomplete\\_16306-10935\\_ENSW.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/files/dms/DeliveringDemocracyfinalcomplete_16306-10935_ENSW.pdf)

100% checking of personal identifiers on all postal voting statements. It would prefer to see a time limit on the application of the 20% minimum threshold, in order to ensure that 100% checking is in place as soon as possible, and hopes that the Government will commit itself to putting the necessary resources and technology in place for this to be implemented before the next UK Parliamentary general election.

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group takes steps to monitor public attitudes to the security of the postal voting system in Wales.**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group takes a lead in setting standards for postal voting packs that are simple and straightforward to use and use language that is accessible to the majority of people.**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers guidelines for advising people about changing their method of voting to ensure that they are simple and straightforward and there is adequate publicity.**

## **Electronic Voting**

2.2.10 Local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland are allowed to apply to the UK Government to conduct electoral pilot schemes to test new methods of voting at local government elections. These are then evaluated by the Electoral Commission. So far, none have taken place in Wales. New methods of voting that have been tried as pilot schemes include:

- e-voting - both using the internet and in special kiosks at polling stations or other public places;
- telephone voting;
- voting by text messaging;

2.2.11 The Committee explored the use of electronic voting both in polling stations and remotely. Members saw two different systems of electronic voting in polling stations in The Netherlands and Belgium.

2.2.12 The Netherlands has been using electronic voting machines extensively since the late 1990s and used the internet for voters abroad in the 2004 EU elections. It can be argued that internet voting and registration would increase turnout, especially among young and busy professionals who have easy access to the internet and whose turnout rates are low. On the other hand, internet voting may not increase access for marginalized groups: the so-called 'digital divide'. Security is also a significant issue. There should be legal, political, operational and technical standards which ensure that e-voting practice complies with the fundamental principles of democratic elections.

2.2.13 The Dutch Government has been carrying major projects to roll out electronic voting using machines or personal computers (PCs) in the polling station, and remote voting (taking place outside a polling station). The Dutch Electoral Council stated that any system of electronic voting needs to be:

- Secret
- Soundly constructed
- Simple to use
- Able to allow mistakes to be corrected.

2.2.14 Most electronic machines in the Netherlands are supplied by a company called NEDAP which has also supplied machines to Germany, France and the USA. However, in 2004 the Irish Government cancelled plans to use NEDAP machines for the European elections due to concerns that they do not produce a paper record of the way a vote was cast, and which are used in case of a dispute or re-count.

2.2.15 Since the Committee's visit there have also been media reports of concerns expressed by a group of Dutch researchers called "Wij vertrouwen stemcomputers niet" (or "We don't trust voting computers") about possible weaknesses in the system. In July 2006 an independent Commission on Electronic Voting in Ireland recommended the voting and counting equipment for use in future elections. The Commission was dissolved in September 2006. The Irish Government has not yet responded to the report.

2.2.16 The other system used in the Netherlands is called SDU, and this system, which was demonstrated to the Committee, uses a touch screen. The company leases the machinery and software to customers and delivers them to the polling stations on election day. The new SDU system will be used in 2006 elections.

2.2.17 In Belgium, the electronic voting system has been designed to closely mimic the manual system. Voters insert a card into a machine, make their choices by touching the screen with a pen and deposit their card in a ballot box. The ballot box performs an automatic count and voting cards are retained in the box in the event that a recount is necessary. Members were assured that the system was very simple to use and had met with little resistance from any sectors of the electorate.

2.2.18 When the Committee consulted on introducing electronic voting in Wales, responses overall reflected a need for balance between using new technologies which might encourage younger voters and taking account of older voters' needs. There was a strong feeling that if electronic means were to be used then the systems would need to be robust to allay security fears. A number of respondents observed that it would make the count quicker and cheaper. The Children's Commissioner for Wales also thought that use of text and internet would mean that young people would be able to use voting methods familiar to them and "reduce the unfamiliar element of the physical act of voting", although issues of access also applied to some groups of young people and security was an issue of equal concern. The Ceredigion Green Party took issue with the parallels drawn with voting for reality TV shows:

“Equating the two activities in many peoples’ minds would trivialise what should be an important civic duty of adults living in a democracy. Voting is not something to be dashed off in a few seconds of texting – it is a serious matter which merits considered thought, discussion, reading of electoral material etc.”

The Committee believes that it is right to move to a system of electronic voting similar to that used in Belgium.

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association encourage Welsh Local Authorities to apply to the UK Government to pilot methods of electronic voting.**

## **Access**

2.2.19 Postal voting and good access to polling stations make voting easier for the elderly and the disabled and this is important for turnout and fairness of elections. In January 2003 the Electoral Commission published best practice guidance for electoral administrators.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, in its report on the 2003 Assembly Elections the Commission found that many disabled people felt that their needs were not sufficiently catered for. The Commission also claimed to have seen ‘a positive and gradual improvement in the number of accessible polling stations in Wales’ by the 2004 Local Elections. However, ‘Polls Apart Cymru’ surveyed around 150 polling stations and found that 77% did not meet its criteria for accessibility.<sup>25</sup>

2.2.20 In his evidence to the Committee Bryn Parry Jones stated:

“On accessibility for disabled people, there are practical issues, which will remain the case despite the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I suspect that a number of buildings that must be used for polling stations, particularly in rural areas where there is little choice, do not have ideal facilities for welcoming disabled people. The Assembly’s initiative for the last election, in terms of providing temporary ramps, was welcomed and was taken advantage of. As to the permanent capacity for buildings to be accessed by everyone, when you are dealing with buildings such as chapel vestries, there is little capacity for investment. There are programmes that both the Assembly and local authorities run, but they usually require match funding for that purpose. Therefore, we do not have a universally ideal situation, though people can now access buildings by using temporary ramps.”

2.2.21 In his evidence to the Committee Gwilym Morris stated:

“As a group, the public buildings used in Wales are probably slightly less accessible than those used in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Again, there is some variation within the overall picture in Wales. There has been a big improvement, and many buildings have been made more accessible. Historically, Wales has been far worse but there has been a dramatic improvement.”

<sup>24</sup> Electoral Commission, *Equal Access to Electoral Procedures*, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Electoral Commission Wales, *Local Elections in Wales*, 2004 (b).



The large print version of the ballot paper in Wales is better because electoral administrators are doing a better job in Wales, probably because of the work the Assembly, we and other organisations have done. They are learning more about the training process, because being on display means something obvious—it means that the large print ballot paper is at eye level. We include that in every training package and the guidance, and we talk to people about it. In many other places, it does not happen—they stick it nine feet in the air, which is of no use to anyone, or they just do not put it out. That is an indication that people are doing a good job in terms of training their presiding officers to ensure that they are following all the guidelines that we and the Assembly give them. That regional variation is obvious; for example, in Wales, the local authorities that are doing a good job broadly, in terms of access, are doing a very good job in terms of ensuring that large-print ballots are displayed.”

2.2.22 In response to wider consultation, opinions were mixed about whether adequate arrangements were in place for helping people with disabilities to register to vote. A number believed that arrangements were adequate, especially with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* (DDA) in place. Others felt that the DDA was not being implemented properly and there was a need for greater compliance.

2.2.23 A number of respondents noted that Electoral Registration Officers could take a proactive role. Roger Morris stated that “it would be good practice for registration officers to offer direct assistance to anyone who needs it” he further noted that “experience with the all-postal pilot voting in the East Midlands in 2004 suggests far fewer people seek this than might be expected, although some allowance must be made for the facility becoming better known”. Torfaen County Borough Council stated that it would be possible to “encourage electors to telephone and ask for assistance or visit offices to seek assistance from staff” and there was scope for the use of telephone/internet registration facilities to register.

2.2.24 A number of respondents noted that there was a need for staff involved in electoral registration to be appropriately trained to assist people with disabilities to register. The Electoral Commission issued comprehensive best practice advice to electoral administrators in 2004 on improving the accessibility of voting and registration and has made recommendations on these issues in Wales and across the UK in successive election reports. It states:

“We encourage electoral registration officers to provide registration materials in accessible formats. The Commission is undertaking targeted campaign work to encourage people with disabilities to register to vote. There is always more that can be done to assist people across the range of disabilities to register and vote and that assistance can often best be provided at local level in consultation with local disability groups.”

2.2.25 Some respondents also suggested that agencies such as social services, carers, Help the Aged, WRVS, Meals on Wheels and other

appropriate networks should be used to promote registration. The Electoral Commission highlighted work already underway:

“The Commission is currently funding a project in Ceredigion called “my voice my vote” specifically aimed at ensuring that people with learning disabilities are aware of their democratic rights, the purposes of voting and how they can use their votes to make a positive difference to their lives. The project will produce a resource pack and will facilitate an Awareness Day in the run-up to the National Assembly for Wales election of 2007. It will aim to train a number of workers on the specifics of ensuring that those individuals with learning difficulties play a full time part in our democratic society.”

2.2.26 The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* implements recommendations of the Electoral Commission and requires local authorities to review their polling districts and polling places at least every four years, with a view to ensuring that all elections in the area have reasonable facilities for voting and that polling stations are accessible to disabled people, as far as reasonably practicable.

2.2.27 Swansea Council highlighted the competing demands on electoral administrators:

“Returning Officers have to consider the needs of all electors in allocating a polling location and at times there can be a conflict between providing a fully accessible polling station and providing one which is in a convenient location. To justify the use of a premise as a polling station we have to prove that we have taken all reasonable steps to find an alternative. This can prove difficult in rural areas where there is not the choice.”

2.2.28 Swansea reported that it carried out regular polling station reviews and had identified all current polling stations which do not fully comply with the DDA and adapted them with temporary ramps, handrails and hearing loops, however it stated that “this is not ideal and is certainly not the answer to providing full disabled access” but suggested that “if the electorate are informed by their returning officer that their polling station is not fully accessible then it gives them time to consider and apply for a postal or proxy vote”. It added that to provide further options of voting for the disabled “the Government must consider a national electronic register and e-voting to enable the electorate to vote at any polling station or via the internet or their mobile phone”.

2.2.29 Torfaen County Borough Council suggested that the timetable could be lengthened from close of nominations to day of election which would enable election staff to have time to visit pensioner complexes/ residential homes and assist electors whether they are disabled or not to vote and put their ballot paper into ballot box.

### **Mobile Ballot Boxes**

2.2.30 Mobile ballot boxes are used in both Denmark and the Netherlands for people who have difficulty in getting to the polling station. When the

Committee asked people in Wales about the use of mobile ballot boxes, respondents were split roughly half and half. Those opposed saw it as unnecessary given that the opportunity to use a postal vote existed and there were concerns about security. Many of those in favour approved the idea in principle but qualified their approval with the need for robust procedures for its use and the need for flexibility in rural areas where its use may not be practical.

## **Standards and Training**

2.2.31 As with registration, a number of respondents felt that staff in polling stations should be appropriately trained to assist people with disabilities to vote. Pembrokeshire County Council reported that “polling station staff are now trained and a consistent part of such training is sensitivity to this issue together with practical guidance”. An authorised electoral officer (who also works in Social Care) visits each County Council Home to assist residents in postal voting, if they so wish. MENCAP Cymru felt that polling clerks should be appraised of the needs of voters with learning disabilities in future elections, as they had encountered cases where young people had been turned away because they needed help reading the ballot paper. In evidence to the South Wales West Regional Committee another representative of MENCAP Cymru said that she had received evidence from people with learning disabilities that although they wanted to vote their support workers would not take them to the polling station.

2.2.32 In response to the proposition that there should be statutory standards relating to accessibility to registration and voting most responses were in favour but with some caveats regarding a need for flexibility in certain circumstances. Roger Morris stated:

“Detailed prescription is not practical in this context, particularly in the case of polling stations. (Government in any case prescribes the canvass form.) The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 duty based on practicability is well understood and precedented in legislation. It appears to be effective in relation to other kinds of premises.”

2.2.33 The Electoral Commission intends to assess the impact of changes in the *Electoral Administration Act 2006* before considering whether further statutory change is required.

2.2.34 Some respondents felt that some clearly defined standards would help ensure more consistency across local authority areas. Swansea Council stated:

“At present some local authorities are much more pro-active in promoting access than other authorities, it is very much up to each Electoral Registration Officer/Returning Officer whether he/she provides the Electoral Form in Braille-large print, provide for registration by telephone/internet. The same applies to the Returning Officer and how he/she promotes access to voting.”

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group takes steps to ensure that guidelines on access to polling stations are consistent and obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are made explicit in all guidance.**

**We recommend that any guidance for polling station staff should take account of the needs of voters with learning disabilities.**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group commissions an assessment of training needs for polling station staff across Wales on issues regarding access and identifies appropriate organisations and mechanisms for delivering training.**

**We recommend that targets are set for local authorities for the percentage of polling stations that are fully accessible to all abilities.**

### **Reporting problems with access to voting**

2.2.35 In the Netherlands, managers at each polling station are required to produce a report at the end of each poll, outlining any difficulties encountered during the polling period. This covers not only access issues but also any other problems voters have encountered at the polling station. These are submitted to the returning officer who in turn is required to submit a report on issues raised to the Dutch Electoral Council.

2.2.36 Most respondents to the Committee's consultation agreed with the proposition that each polling station manager should submit a report along the lines of current practice in the Netherlands. However, some suggested that if problems arose they would be reported anyway and others stressed the importance of any reports being followed up and acted on. Roger Morris noted:

“Informal reporting is already a practice in some areas, and is part of the Electoral Commission's consideration of performance standards under section 67 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006. Reports should be straightforward and limited to what is strictly necessary.”

2.2.37 The Committee welcomes the introduction of this requirement under the Electoral Administration Act and agrees that it will be important for electoral administrators and others to act on the results.

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers what mechanism could be created to ensure that any problems identified in polling station manager's reports are acted on and addressed as a matter of priority.**

### **Use of alternative venues**

2.2.38 Consultation responses to the proposition that alternative venues to traditional polling stations should be used for voting were mixed. While

some were strongly opposed, most responses were happy with the idea of alternative venues such as supermarkets but many were clear that they should be subject to the same standards as polling stations and security should be robust. One respondent noted that it would be difficult for the political parties to employ tellers in a supermarket (Ceredigion Green Party).

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association encourage Welsh local authorities to apply to the UK Government in order to participate in any pilot schemes involving the use of alternative venues for voting.**

## **Cost and Resource Implications**

2.2.39 As discussed in the section of this report dealing with voter registration, much of the evidence received indicated that electoral administration is seen as a ‘Cinderella’ service in the majority of local authorities.

2.2.40 The increase in postal voting has raised issues about the capacity of returning officers and electoral staff to cope with the electoral process, as was noted by the Electoral Commission in its report on the 2004 local government Elections (although another factor was combined elections held on the same day).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the introduction of security measures to ensure continued trust in the system and introducing innovations such as e-voting all have cost implications and raise questions about staff capacity and ‘ownership’ of the electoral process. Some electoral administrators feel that to date e-voting pilots have raised concerns amongst returning officers that control of the election process is effectively taken over by IT specialists.<sup>27</sup>

2.2.41 In his evidence to the Committee Roger Morris commented:

“I took part in an Electoral Commission exercise two or three years ago about the cost of elections, but those figures have long since gone out of the window because that everyone will be manning all the usual polling stations over the next few weeks, but at the same time they will be doing a tremendous postal exercise. Therefore, the cost benefit is also changing. We have not touched on that this morning, but, from the point of view of election management, that is an important issue.”

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group explores the scope for cost rationalisation and joined-up delivery of electoral services in Wales that will allow electoral administrators and returning officers to carry out their duties and responsibilities, including those introduced by the Electoral Administration Act 2006, effectively.**

<sup>26</sup> Op.cit., Electoral Commission, 2004 (b).

<sup>27</sup> Comments on egovmonitor by Malcolm Dumper, Executive Director (Policy & External Affairs), Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)  
<http://www.egovmonitor.com/features/evoting2003.html>

## **Other issues raised in response to consultation**

2.2.42 Other issues raised by respondents which are out with the remit of the scrutiny project included the rising of Town and Community Council elections and by-elections; the timing of polling day on Thursdays and compulsory voting.

### **Compulsory Voting**

2.2.43 Voting in all Belgian elections is compulsory and has been so for more than a century. There are various sanctions that can be imposed on non-voters, ranging from fines to, after three instances of non-voting, being banned from voting for a set period. The taking of action against non-voters is at the discretion of the local mayor's office. Of the 8% of voters who did not vote in the last national election, around 1% had action taken against them.

2.2.44 One respondent to the Committee's consultation was disappointed not to be asked about compulsory voting and a small handful of respondents identified compulsory voting as the best way to increase turnout.

### **Timing of Elections**

2.2.45 As with compulsory voting, a handful of respondents noted that the traditional timing of elections on a Thursday might affect turnout and suggested moving polling day to a Saturday or Sunday, or indeed running elections over both days.

## 2.3 PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN ELECTIONS

2.3.1 In the 2003 Assembly Elections turnout amongst the under 25's was 16 per cent. The percentage of registered voters aged 18-34 who did not vote on polling day was almost 80 per cent. [Source: Electoral Commission "Wales – poll position: Public attitudes towards Assembly Elections' research report, September 2006]. The Committee finds these statistics alarming and agrees that declining turnout, especially amongst young people, must be addressed.

2.3.2 Turnout amongst young people is an issue across different countries. In the UK age differences in turnout were evident in the 2001 General Election. In general people who were under 34 were less likely to vote than those in older age groups.

2.3.3 Voting behaviour can be linked to young people's attitudes and a study for the Department for Education & Skills found that levels of political interest among young people had fallen between 1994 and 1998 and again in 2003. In 1994, 38 per cent said they had at least some interest in politics; in 2003, this applied to only 31 per cent. Over the same period, the proportion expressing no interest at all has grown, from just over a quarter to over a third.<sup>28</sup>

2.3.4 The study showed a clear correlation between levels of interest in politics shown by adults in the same household and academic attainment. However, the 2003 data demonstrated that political interest among young people has declined while adult levels of interest have remained stable. The paper states:

"A number of possible explanations exist. It is possible, for instance, that parents now are less effective in communicating their own interest to young people. Alternatively, the decline in interest among young people might indicate that they have responded differently to adults to the political events of recent years."<sup>29</sup>

2.3.5 In Sweden the Committee received a presentation from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), an intergovernmental organisation that promotes sustainable democracy worldwide. IDEA noted the 'three election principle', that if you're not a voter after your first three elections you never will be.

2.3.6 Responses to the Committee's consultation attributed poor turnout by young people in Wales to a range of factors, namely: a feeling of being excluded by the political process; a feeling that politics or political institutions are not relevant to them; apathy (of both young people themselves and their parents) and a lack of knowledge. With regard to the latter point, one respondent cited the example of a young woman who, "when asked if she would vote for her local councillor replied that it didn't apply to her because she didn't live in a council house." Another respondent made the point that

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<sup>28</sup> Park, A Phillips M & Johnson M, *Young People in Britain: the Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, DFES, 2004. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR564.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

young people no longer felt a civic duty to vote. Some respondents made the point that many young people were interested in single issue politics. In terms of knowledge about the Assembly, 2006 research by the Electoral Commission in its report *‘Wales: poll position’* showed that awareness of the Assembly’s composition, remit and record was fairly low among young people. The report states that:

“Outside of raising the Assembly’s profile for 2007, many younger respondents stated that teaching in schools of the role of the (National Assembly for Wales) and citizen’s responsibilities to vote in elections in general could be vastly improved. Most of those who had only recently left secondary education did not recall being told about the Assembly at school and felt that a more thorough programme of education would be essential to improving young people’s awareness of and engagement with it in the future.”

### **Getting young people to register**

2.3.7 On 21 June 2006, Glyn Mathias, Electoral Commissioner told the Committee:

“On the issue of sharing good practice, it is clear that local authorities have hitherto often adopted entirely different practices about promoting registration and elections in general. There have been different perceptions in the electoral community about their legal obligations in this area. As I mentioned, the Electoral Administration Bill will oblige electoral officers in local authorities to promote elections, and that includes promoting registration. Where promotional work has been done, there has been very little evaluation of it. We are keen for promotional work to be evaluated, and we hope that that will be developed through the elections planning group. We can then work out the best ways of doing promotional work and that best practice can be shared. So, that is work to be done.”

2.3.8 The Committee strongly supports efforts to promote registration, in particular registration of young people and those from so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ groups, such as looked-after children and care leavers.

2.3.9 The Electoral Commission has established an Outreach team to facilitate delivery of a public awareness strategy aimed at hard to reach groups, initially focusing on providing democracy workshops for 16-19 year olds outside formal education in Wales. This work has included engaging young people in supported housing (i.e. care leavers) in collaboration with the Foyer Federation. In 2005 the Commission ran a joint registration campaign with the organisation targeting young people in Foyer accommodation – of which there are three centres located in Wales – and funded a voter awareness project with the Foyer Federation through its New Initiatives Fund.

2.3.10 An audit of political engagement published by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in March 2006 pointed out considerable disparities in levels of political engagement among certain social groups. It reported that “in particular, political disengagement appears entrenched and widespread among those living in ‘very deprived’ areas. Our findings add to



the growing body of evidence that suggests social and political exclusion are strongly related and mutually reinforcing.”

2.3.11 In producing its interim report the Committee was strongly of the view that measures should be put in place to facilitate the inclusion of young people who are socially and economically excluded from society and feel alienated from the democratic process.

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers regional and nation-wide approaches to the promotion of voting by young people.**

**We recommend that the Elections Planning Group considers rolling out targeted initiatives to encourage socially and economically excluded groups of young people to vote.**

### **Citizenship and political education in Wales**

2.3.12 Citizenship education is currently delivered via a Key Stage 1-4 (ages 5-16) Personal and Social Education (PSE) framework in Wales. Though PSE has been statutory in Wales since September 2003, the framework is non-statutory. The PSE framework is designed to be delivered through a variety of means and not necessarily through separate PSE lessons. The Committee was told it is intended to allow flexibility for schools to deliver PSE in a way which suits their needs and available resources – both within the school and the local community. Schools are expected to assign a member of staff as the PSE Coordinator to ensure that this takes place.

2.3.13 The teaching of citizenship and ‘political literacy’ in Wales was explored in more detail with the Assembly’s head of curriculum assessment for 3-14 year olds, and its adviser on the PSE framework in Wales on 19 October 2006.

2.3.14 Officials provided the Committee with a working definition of ‘political literacy’:

Political literacy is about helping young people become politically aware and effective. It is about giving them the ability to interpret issues and events politically and as such is a complex mix of knowledge, skills and values.

For young people political literacy involves:

- knowing how decisions are made in society – locally, nationally and Internationally;
- being familiar with a range of basic political concepts;
- recognising one’s right to participate in the democratic process;
- differentiating between the policies of the main political parties;
- developing a personal set of political values and having the skills and confidence to apply them in practice.

2.3.15 In contrast to the non-statutory framework in Wales, citizenship was introduced as a statutory subject in the English secondary school National Curriculum in 2002. A recent Ofsted Report in England said that:

“Significant progress has been made in implementing National Curriculum citizenship in many secondary schools. However, there is not yet a strong consensus about the aims of citizenship education or about how to incorporate it into the curriculum. In a quarter of schools surveyed, provision is still inadequate, reflecting weak leadership and lack of specialist teaching.”

2.3.16 The Children’s Commissioner for Wales commented on the current mechanism for political education in Wales as follows:

“Awareness of political structures and the voting process is included within Personal and Social Education (PSE) and as this area of study is not statutorily assessed there is no measure as to how successfully and consistently these areas are taught within schools. Where PSE is delivered by non-specialist teachers the success of teaching these quite complex matters may depend greatly on the skills and personal knowledge of individual teachers. Therefore, the delivery of political education may be inconsistent across Wales and young people may have varying levels of knowledge in relation to the political process. .. The young people in the advisory groups said that learning about voting in schools would be useful as it would help them to make informed choices, give them more confidence and encourage them to vote. However concerns were raised about PSE lessons and their effectiveness, with the young people stating that lessons about voting should be fun and interactive”.

2.3.17 The Committee shares the concern that teaching of political education in Welsh schools is patchy, and that the models for delivery vary. It is strongly of the view that political education should be mainstreamed in the life of all schools and be for *all* children in those schools. Staff in schools should be adequately equipped to teach political education and to promote awareness of the role of young people in the democratic process.

2.3.18 The Committee applauds the schemes that already exist to support this aim, many of which focus on an understanding of citizenship in the context of civil society, but feels that it should be recognised that political parties are a vital part of that civil society.

2.3.19 Most of those responding to consultation strongly favoured an increase in political education in schools and many believed that this should focus on a greater appreciation and understanding of the political system and the different levels of government. Some respondents stressed the importance of teaching about the principles of democracy in an historical context. Several however, expressed concerns about biased teaching.

2.3.20 However, while most respondents favoured more political education in schools there were mixed reactions to the proposition that students should be taught about party politics. Some respondents were

opposed altogether, others were in favour with strong caveats about equal treatment and neutrality. Many favoured hustings, mock elections and inviting local representatives into the school to hold discussions with pupils. A number of respondents, including One Voice Wales, made the point that it was important that all political parties should be included.

2.3.21 MENCAP Cymru made some specific points in relation to pupils with learning disabilities:

Young people with learning disabilities have a low level of registration to vote. Our 'Partners in Politics' project seeks to address this. We will be sending people with learning disabilities into schools to talk to young people with LD/statements of special educational need. They will be specially trained to deliver the 'Diversity in Dialogue' programme which encourages self advocacy and involvement in politics.

### **Review of the curriculum and PSE framework**

2.3.22 The Committee was told that a review of the curriculum is underway and that a review of the PSE framework will form part of that. It was reported that Welsh schools have found it quite difficult to plan for a broad and balanced programme under the current framework and that the revised framework will include five broad themes, one of which will be active citizenship. Supplementary web-based guidance for schools has been updated, and will signpost bilingual resources and support organisations to help deliver it.

2.3.23 The timetable is for a three month consultation with schools and other interested organisations from January 2007, publication of the framework in January 2008, and full implementation from September 2008.

2.3.24 The Committee welcomes moves to give a higher profile to citizenship in the revised framework and to publicise the availability of support resources. It recognises the importance of balance in the teaching of citizenship, and believes that the teaching process must be made more open to political parties. Having reviewed experiences in other European countries, it is of the view that training and supporting teachers to teach citizenship in a balanced way should include bringing in expertise from outside Wales.

**We recommend that the ongoing review of the curriculum, including the public consultation exercise, should pay particular attention to the need to develop political understanding amongst young people and to teach them about the roles, policies and positioning of political parties as well as political processes.**

### **Resistance of staff to teach politics**

2.3.25 The Committee recognises that some staff may be reluctant to teach political education but at the same time that unless political education in schools is handled properly and appropriately, the numbers of people voting in elections and participating in the democratic process will continue to fall. The

Committee believes that there should be support within the school framework for raising young people's awareness about the party-political process, and to support staff to deliver this aspect of PSE.

2.3.26 Education officials told the Committee that the Education Act 1996 restricts schools to delivering political education in a way that must be unbiased and balanced and that safeguards therefore need to be built into the system. The Committee however noted that this was also the case in other areas, such as broadcasting.

2.3.27 In relation to reluctance to teach politics, PSE adviser Mark Lancett told the Committee,

“That is a significant issue, not just in the delivery of active citizenship and democracy teaching, but in the delivery of personal and social education in general. In primary schools, PSE tends to be delivered by the class teacher, who has to teach every other national curriculum subject, so their expertise in this particular area, by definition, is probably limited. In secondary schools, there are different models of delivering PSE. Sometimes, PSE is delivered by the form tutor, so you would have people with a whole range of subject specialities delivering these elements of the curriculum, and therefore they would not necessarily have confidence in their delivery of the material. Other schools, however, have specialist teams of PSE teachers, not that they have been trained specifically to deliver PSE, but they have volunteered and form a small, core team. That model allows targeted training of those individual members of staff and broad, targeted provision of resources to support the delivery. Again, we have no control over how schools choose to deliver PSE; it is entirely a school management issue. However, training is a major issue.”

2.3.28 Given that teaching of citizenship and politics is not a statutory curriculum subject and that schools are given flexibility in the delivery of PSE, the Committee notes the important role of head teachers, senior school staff and school governors in ensuring the development of awareness of the democratic process within schools.

### **Experiences from other countries**

2.3.29 On its visit to Denmark the Committee found that voting was a strong social norm and that the Danish Election Unit had been successful in mobilising hard to reach groups in society and young people. Danish electoral institutions, such as the political parties, facilitated the mobilisation of weak groups.

2.3.30 Danish schools have elected councils made up of two representatives per class. The Education team from Copenhagen Council thought that Council Committees should encourage school councils to give evidence to committee hearings. The council had written a handbook, *The Pupil's Guide to Democracy*. There is an expectation in Denmark that young people will take part in activities outside school and external organisations tend to replicate the democratic decision making structures in the schools. The young people that the Committee met indicated a strong expectation that they should vote.

2.3.31 In Denmark the profits from gambling are channelled towards youth organisations and both the party youth groups that the Committee met received funding from the Government through the Danish Youth Council. This means that they are independent from the 'parent' parties. The Conservatives have around 2,000 members and the Liberals around 3,000. The party groups will go to schools to recruit and to participate in meetings at election time.

2.3.32 In Sweden, there is a high turnout amongst all voters (around 90% at each election) with turnout amongst young voters being around 85%. The Committee was told that one of the reasons for this was the way in which children are taught about democracy and politics in schools. The youth wings from the major political parties (which are funded by the state) are often invited into schools to initiate and join in debates about various topics and to teach the students about their parties' politics. Students are also encouraged to debate issues affecting their schooling and school councils are very highly regarded and listened to. Many young people in Sweden are also members of non political groups or clubs outside school which also encourage debate and democratic participation at a local level.

2.3.33 Following its visit to Denmark the Committee took evidence from bodies involved in political education in Wales, including the Council for World Citizenship (CEWC) Cymru and Welsh Assembly Government officials involved with PSE and other participation activities. It also consulted with organisations representing children and young people in Wales.

### **Links between participation and active citizenship**

2.3.34 In their evidence to the Committee, officials from the Assembly's Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills emphasised the links between citizenship education and wider work on participation activities. This work is underpinned by the Assembly's commitment to article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In October 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government issued guidance to schools on how school councils should operate, and these school councils, which are now mandatory in all Welsh schools, were recognised by other witnesses as an important mechanism for teaching young people skills in democratic participation.

2.3.35 CEWC-Cymru recognises participation in school councils as one of the best ways for young people to experience "local" governance, but emphasised that school councils should not be created without a supporting ethos of participation which encourages all members of the school to voice their opinions. It has produced a toolkit with case studies to support teachers and senior management to develop students' participation skills, and is developing PSE lesson plans on the skills and knowledge necessary for participation, focusing on Communities First areas which have lower than average turnout rates for voters.

## Existing good practice

2.3.36 The Committee received a number of responses to consultation and oral evidence that pointed to examples of good practice in citizenship education. It noted the work of Youth Councils and practices such as mock elections, hustings, visits to councils and democracy events aimed at sixth formers. In Torfaen a successful citizenship programme was reported, with initiatives run by the local authority to raise awareness of how the council operates and of the electoral process. However, Torfaen County Borough Council added that “it is often difficult to get schools on board even when willing and free resources are available from the local authority”. Swansea Council also reported an active programme of community engagement involving an annual programme of school visits by the elections unit and annual local democracy weeks aimed primarily at young people. Rhyl Town Council reported that it had been influenced by a local school’s council to make decisions which directly impacted on school life and led to the introduction of playground furniture, giving young people an insight into the democratic decision-making process.

2.3.37 The Electoral Commission told the Committee about its general work in Wales to increase democratic knowledge amongst 16-24 year olds, including running workshops for young people; facilitating ‘Democracy Day’ conferences for schools and colleges; visiting universities and colleges in partnership with local authorities to encourage student registration; producing education resources such as the Democracy Cookbook and an interactive ‘Democracy Disk’ CD-Rom. Through its New Initiatives Fund a programme of Assembly Member visits to schools has been run in collaboration with the Hansard Society.

2.3.38 The National Assembly for Wales’ Education Service organises visits for primary and secondary schools to give pupils an opportunity to learn more about the Assembly and the importance of voting and democracy, with links to the National Curriculum and PSE Framework. It provides whiteboard resources for teachers and also organises educational events. Under the *Government of Wales Act 2006* the Assembly Commission will have specific powers to promote public awareness of elections and devolved government in Wales and may carry out programmes of education or information or make grants to other persons or bodies for that purpose. The Commission may also provide financial assistance to the Electoral Commission to carry out its functions under section 13 of the *PPERA Act 2000* specifically in relation to promoting public awareness of elections and devolved government in Wales.

2.3.39 Transitional arrangements set out in the Act mean that the Assembly’s Shadow Commission is able to undertake such work between now and Assembly elections in May 2007. The Committee would like to see full advantage being taken of this opportunity to promote the importance of participation in the democratic process.

2.3.40 When the Committee took evidence from the Chief Executive of the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association (AWEMA), Mr Naz Malik, he pointed out the importance of education being for everyone. He identified particular

problems for black and minority ethnic (BME) communities of the means of communication, comprehension and understanding, and reminded the Committee of previous efforts to put in place an education programme of Assembly Member shadowing. Mr Malik went on to suggest:

“More importantly, it would be quite good to have some kind of shadowing scheme that involves schools in public debates. Why can we not have a national debating competition, for example, the finals of which could be held in the National Assembly’s debating chamber?”

Four of the last six teams could come to compete in the final round in the Chamber with the active participation of Assembly Members, or perhaps we could find pupils who may have alignment with different political parties who could be mentored by Assembly Members. I think that that is one way of doing it.

Another way could be to involve local councillors and local authorities in local competitions where there is a shadowing scheme with local councillors. That could be an important way of doing it.”

**We recommend that guidance to schools on the teaching of ‘political literacy’ should specifically include teaching about political parties and young people’s role in the democratic process as well as basic political concepts.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government reviews guidance to senior school management and governors to ensure that the importance of promoting political literacy in the life of the school in a balanced and non-partisan manner is recognised and to encourage inviting voluntary, private and public service organisations, including political parties, into schools to facilitate debate amongst pupils.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government takes a coordinated approach to the guidance it gives schools on the operation of school councils and on citizenship activities, to ensure that these are properly contributing to pupils’ political understanding and appropriate links are being made between school council activities and other citizenship initiatives, such as inviting politicians into schools.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government reviews its internal structures to ensure that a strategic coordinated approach is taken to the delivery of citizenship education, from curriculum development to teacher training and classroom activities.**

**We recommend that guidance and training should focus on ensuring that all pupils, regardless of their background, are encouraged equally to participate in school councils and other citizenship initiatives and that Estyn should monitor representation and participation from an equality perspective.**

**We recommend that measures are put in place to ensure that all secondary schools deliver Personal and Social Education (PSE) using specially trained and resourced teachers.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government takes the lead in facilitating training of teachers in PSE, providing resource packs for such training and supporting teachers in the delivery of PSE.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government ensures that existing examples of good practice in citizenship and political education are adequately disseminated to all schools and youth groups in Wales.**

**We recommend that the Assembly Commission and local authorities develop initiatives that provide young people from different backgrounds with opportunities to shadow elected politicians from the Assembly and Local Government, and to participate in debates with politicians. Such initiatives should take account of existing good practice in Wales and elsewhere.**



## 2.4 RECOGNISING DIVERSITY IN ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

### Language

2.4.1 Linguistic ability is an important factor in allowing individuals to access the electoral process, whether in terms of registration, or in the act of voting, such as understanding the ballot paper or being able to access advice. Currently, key statutory forms such as ballot papers and registration are available in English and Welsh in Wales. In December 2004 the Government published its response to proposals from the Electoral Commission:

**Returning Officers should have powers to provide sample ballot papers in polling stations on request in a variety of languages, Braille and large print. However, electors would continue to vote on a standard ballot paper.**

The Government agrees with the aim of this recommendation, and wants to make voting easier and more accessible for all the electorate. However, rather than producing sample ballot papers which may cause confusion, we will enable Returning Officers to deliver improved services, mirroring best practice by supporting the development of guidance in different formats

**Guidance notes should also be available at each polling station and on ballot papers that explain clearly how to vote. These should be provided in other languages, if deemed necessary, and in a pictorial format.**

The Government agrees with the aim of this recommendation. However, we do not wish to clutter ballot papers with additional wording and will therefore seek to ensure that additional information is provided at polling stations in different formats reflecting current best practice.

**Returning Officers should have statutory powers to provide key statutory forms (including registration forms, polling station notices, etc) in a variety of languages and formats, in addition to English and Welsh. The languages used would be at the discretion of the Returning Officer.**

The Government agrees with this proposal to allow Returning Officers to provide key statutory forms in a variety of languages and formats, in addition to English and Welsh, at their discretion, with the exception of registration forms. The registration forms should in the Government's view be in English and Welsh only, but should be supported by guidance notes in a variety of languages and formats available on request. This will support the electorate but would also clarify that such forms should be completed in English or Welsh only.<sup>30</sup>

2.4.2 While all statutory documentation is available in Welsh as well as English questions still arise as to support and advice available through the medium of Welsh. These issues are encountered in other countries

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<sup>30</sup> DCA, *The Government's Response to The Electoral Commission's report: Voting for change – An electoral law modernisation programme*, December 2004.  
<http://www.dca.gov.uk/elections/govresp-vfc-cm6426.pdf>

with more than one official language. The extract below is from the 2000 Elections Canada Report.

For the general election, all election officers were trained to carry out their responsibilities to provide service in both official languages. As usual, returning officers were instructed to recruit bilingual workers. In areas of the country where it was difficult to recruit bilingual staff, an alternative was to give unilingual election workers descriptive cards explaining to electors how to obtain service in either official language. A toll-free 1 800 number for bilingual service from Elections Canada was available, all election-related information was available in both official languages, and our Web site is fully bilingual.<sup>31</sup>

2.4.3 With regard to bilingual voting Bryn Parry Jones noted that while it was 'a necessary requirement in terms of the expectations of the people of Wales... it is not necessarily fully understood in terms of the way that elections are run on a UK basis'.

2.4.4 Current practice in relation to providing electoral services in languages other than English and Welsh is set out in Guidelines issued by the Electoral Commission.

### **Response to consultation**

2.4.5 With regard to the availability of advice in Welsh and English for elections most respondents noted that literature was provided in both Welsh and English and this was not an issue. There was also general agreement that the presence of Welsh speaking staff should reflect the linguistic make up of the area. It was acknowledged that this would provide a greater challenge in linguistically mixed areas. Llanelli Town Council stated that: "perhaps a more conscious effort needs to be made by Returning Officers to ensure that at least one staff member at each station is bilingual". Swansea Council said that it was not feasible to equip all its polling stations with members of staff who are fluent in Welsh but "we can identify parts of our area where Welsh is predominately spoken and we do ensure that at least one member of the polling station staff in those areas can converse in Welsh".

2.4.6 Most responses identified the provision of literature in languages other than Welsh and English as the key factor in encouraging more BME people to register and vote. A number of respondents also identified liaison between community leaders and BME networks and Electoral Registration Officers and local authorities as important, and some suggested that education in the electoral process should be provided. The response from City and County of Swansea said:

"Each authority must be seen to go into their communities, possibly via mosques, meeting places, community leaders and holding open days where they can register to vote.  
...we can identify areas of Swansea that have a high record of BME electors, therefore we always seek to ensure that one member of staff

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<sup>31</sup> Elections Canada, Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 37th General Election Held on November 27, 2000  
<http://www.elections.ca/content.asp?section=gen&document=stat08&dir=rep/sta&lang=e&anchor=8&textonly=false#8>

employed at the polling stations would be able to converse in their relevant language. This appointment is made by involving the community groups.”

2.4.7 Several responses suggested that all voters should be treated the same regardless of their background.

### **Experiences in other countries**

2.4.8 When the Committee looked at experiences in other countries it found a mixed picture in terms of provision for voters whose first language was not that of their country of residence.

2.4.9 In Denmark there are 74 Local Integration Councils and part of the work of the Councils is to familiarise new immigrants with the political system and to encourage participation. There are no special arrangements for non-Danish speakers as a legal requirement but some municipalities may make provision for voters in other languages.

2.4.10 The city of Brussels is officially bi-lingual. Each linguistic group (Walloon and Flemish) has its own voting list and, in many cases, its own candidates. In Belgium as a whole, there are three linguistic areas, Flemish, Walloon and German. Each has its own list and candidates. In each area, the voting list is only produced in the official language of that area. There are no special arrangements for voters whose native tongue is not the official language of their voting region for national and local elections. Guidance for European elections, where any EU national can vote, is produced in English and German.

2.4.11 There was an assumption in all three countries that, in order to be eligible to vote (either by gaining nationality or residency qualifications) a certain proficiency in the language of their adopted country was displayed by voters.

### **Format of electoral material**

2.4.12 Overall most responses to the Committee’s consultation felt that forms and information on voting and registration were clear and understandable, although it was acknowledged that less literate voters may struggle.<sup>32</sup> A significant minority thought that they were difficult to understand, citing reasons such as complex and detailed language and problems in understanding the arrangements for Assembly elections and the eligibility of EU citizens to vote in local and Assembly elections. With regard to complex language, CEWC-Cymru observed:

“On the accessibility of written materials, it is not only Welsh speakers or black and ethnic minority groups that struggle with understanding the language in which elections are conducted. The language used on forms and on the media throughout the process needs to be easily understood and jargon-free, for those with special education needs and others to feel

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Q.21

more comfortable and informed about the process. Putting candidates' pictures next to their names on ballot sheets as a matter of course should be given serious consideration too in this regard."

2.4.13 The Committee took evidence from the Electoral Commission on its work to target groups who may be less likely to register and vote, and was told that the Commission's new Partnership Grants programme funds projects that work with all ages and aimed at those who are not in formal education, from ethnic minority groups and those with disabilities. The Committee welcomes initiatives aimed at these target groups.

**We recommend that it should be a requirement to provide bilingual support and advice to people through both the registration and voting process in all electoral areas of Wales. Where it is not possible to have bilingual staff present, people should be able to access personal advice in the language of their choice, for example via a freephone number.**

**We recommend that targeted support and advice in languages other than Welsh and English through both the registration and voting process, should be provided in electoral areas in Wales according to need.**

**We recommend that continued efforts are made to improve the accessibility of all electoral material in Wales and to take full account of the needs of people with learning disabilities, limited literacy and those whose first language is not English or Welsh.**

## **ANNEXES**

### **Annex A**

#### **Schedule of Evidence Taken**

##### **Oral evidence**

Association of Electoral Administrators  
All Wales Ethnic Minority Association  
Council for Education in World Citizenship Cymru  
Bryn Parry Jones, Regional Returning Officer for Wales at the June 2004  
European election  
Roger Morris, Regional Returning Officer for East Midlands at the June 2004  
elections  
Scope Cymru  
The Pollen Shop  
Welsh Assembly Government – Department for Education, Lifelong Learning  
and Skills  
Welsh Assembly Government – Local Government Policy Division

##### **Written evidence**

Ambleston Community Council  
Amroth Community Council  
Bagillt Community Council, Flintshire  
Bay of Colwyn Town Council  
Beaumaris Town Council  
Bethesda Community Council  
Bontnewydd Community Council  
Brackla Community Council  
Bridgend Town Council  
Bronington Community Council  
Burton Community Council  
Carmarthenshire County Council  
Ceredigion Green Party  
Chepstow Town Council  
Children's Commissioner for Wales  
Churchstoke Community Council  
Clive Green  
Coity Higher Community Council  
Connah's Quay Town Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Council for Education in World Citizenship-Cymru (CEWC-Cymru)  
Cowbridge with Llanblethian Town Council  
Cwm Cadnant Community Council  
Cyngor Cymned Aberdaron  
Cyngor Cymuned Llangedwyn Community Council  
Cyngor Tref Abergele Town Council  
Electoral Commission  
Ewenny Community Council  
Fishguard Town Council  
Gelligaer Community Council

Haverfordwest Town Council  
Henllys Community Council  
Holywell Town council  
Hope Community Council  
Kerry Community Council.doc  
Lisvane Community Council  
Llanbadarn Fawr Community Council  
Llandough Community Council  
Llanelli Town Council  
Llanelli Rural Council  
Llangattock Vibon Avel Community Council  
Llangunllo Community Council  
Llangynog Community Council  
Magor with Undy Community Council  
Mencap (Jane King)  
Merthyr Cynog Community Council  
Milford Haven Town Council  
Mold Town Council  
Cyngor Cymuned Llannor  
Mumbles Community Council  
Nelson Community Council  
North Wales Association of Town & Larger Community Council  
One Voice Wales  
Paul Richards  
Pembrey and Burry- Port County Council  
Pembrokeshire County Council  
Penally Community Council  
Penarth Town Council  
Penhow Community Council  
Pontardawe Town Council  
Pontypool Community Council  
Pyle Town Council  
Rhyl Town Council  
Roger L. Brown, Vicar of Welshpool  
Roger Morris  
Simon Moffett  
Solva Community Council  
Swansea County Council  
Torfaen County Borough Council  
Wenvoe Community Council

Consultation responses and other key documents can be found on the  
Committee's web page:  
<http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemlocgovpubsvs/content/elect-e.htm>

## **Annex B**

### **Committee Visit to the Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1. The remit of the Committee's Scrutiny Project is:

- To consider the issues surrounding the arrangements for local government and National Assembly elections in Wales, in particular, voter registration, voter turnout, the participation of young people and bilingual voting.
- To consider a range of measures used within other political systems to improve voter turnout, registration and the participation of young people and the extent to which they could be applied to local government and National Assembly elections in Wales.
- To consider if any additional measures are required to ensure that voting arrangements in Wales are fully inclusive.
- To make recommendations.

1.2. Between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 2005 the Committee undertook a visit to the Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium to acquire further evidence regarding voter registration; participation by young people; electronic voting and bilingual voting.

The members of the Committee available for the visit were:

Ann Jones AM (Chair)  
Sue Essex AM  
Mike German AM  
Dai Lloyd AM  
Brynle Williams AM

They were accompanied by the Committee Clerk, Virginia Hawkins and MRS Researcher, Alys Thomas.

0.2. This paper gives an account of then activities undertaken by the Committee during the visit and highlights some of the key issues arising from the discussions.

#### **2 The Visit**

##### **2.1. Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September: The Hague, The Netherlands.**

Firstly the Committee received a political briefing on the Netherlands at the British Embassy by Andrew Price, Head of Political Section. Andre Batenburg, of the Embassy, accompanied the Committee for the rest of the day.

The Committee visited the Electoral Council which is part of the Constitutional Affairs and Legislation Department. The Council is an advisory body to

Government and Parliament on practical matters relating to elections or questions of franchise and it acts as central polling station for national elections and for European Parliamentary elections. The Committee met staff from the Council's secretariat and received briefings on the Dutch electoral system; the system of electronic voting and distance voting (use of ICT in elections).

In the afternoon the Committee visited SDU which is the state printer and publisher in the Netherlands. SDU staff gave a presentation to the Committee on 'New Vote', its pc-based electronic voting system and Members were able to try out the system.

## **2.2. Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September: Copenhagen, Denmark.**

In the morning the Committee met with Per Bregnegaard, Copenhagen's Mayor for Education and Youth, Karsten Strorup, International Co-ordinator for Education & Youth Administration, and Merete Papapetros, Schools Development Officer at Copenhagen Town Hall. They discussed political participation by young people.

The Committee then met with Anne Birte Pade and Grete Kongstad, of the Election Unit in the Ministry of the Interior and Health where they discussed voter turnout and registration; the Danish electoral system; the Unit's role in promoting voting and accessibility of polling stations. This was followed by a lunchtime meeting with Greenland's Head of Representation in Copenhagen, Einar Lemche, and staff.

After lunch Members visited the headquarters of Konservativ Ungdom, the youth wing of the People's Conservative Party, and received a presentation about the organisation's activities from the National Chairman Kasper Hülsen and other party officials. They then proceeded to the Ministry for Refugees, Immigration and Integration where they met with Sükrü Ertosun, Chairman of the Council for Ethnic Minorities and other Council Members and staff. They discussed the work of the Council and its Local Integration Councils in familiarising new immigrants with the political system and political participation.

## **2.3. Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> September, Copenhagen, Denmark.**

In the morning the Committee met with Karsten Lauritzen, and Mette Bode of Venstre Ungdom, the youth wing of the ruling Liberal Party. The Committee received a presentation on the organisation's activities.

Later, Members attended a reception at the British Embassy for senior secondary school students from Falkonergaarden and Øregaard Gymnasium. Around 14 students attended with two teachers and the Committee was able to discuss the students' views about political participation with them on an informal basis.



The visit concluded with a lunch at the Ambassador's Residence. This was hosted by the ambassador, Sir Nicholas Browne and was also attended by some of the people the Committee had met earlier in the visit.

Wendy Wyvers of the British Embassy accompanied the Committee during its visit in Copenhagen.

## **2.4 Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September, Brussels, Belgium**

First, the Committee went to Wales House where it received a presentation on the Belgian Constitution by Desmond Clifford of the Welsh Assembly Government. It then proceeded to the Federal Ministry for Internal Affairs and met Luc Smet in the Directorate for Elections. Later it met with Stéphane Toumpsin, at the Population Department in the Town Hall of Ixelles, Brussels. The visit concluded with lunch at Wales House with the Ambassador Richard Kinchen, Mr Nigel Bowie, Deputy Head of Mission and Consul-General and Wales House staff.

## **3 Issues arising from the Visit**

### **3.1 Voter Registration**

A key contrast between the UK and the countries visited in the way in which voters are registered. In all three countries visited voter registration is linked to the civil registry or a national citizens' registry. Moreover, electoral lists are not public and therefore not available to political parties which means that the kind of canvassing that is feature of elections in the UK does not occur.

***Members may wish to consider whether they wish to make any representations to the UK Government on the proposals to change aspects of voter registration in the Electoral Registration Bill.***

### **3.2. The Voting Experience**

#### *3.2.1. Electronic Voting*

The Committee received demonstrations of different electronic voting systems in the Netherlands and Brussels.

The Dutch Government has been carrying major projects to roll out electronic voting (which takes place by using machines or PCs in the polling station) and remote voting (which takes place outside a polling station).

The Dutch Electoral Council stated that any system of electronic voting needs to be:

- Secret
- Soundly constructed
- Simple to use
- Able to allow mistakes to be corrected.

Most electronic machines in the Netherlands are supplied by a company called NEDAP which has also supplied them to Germany, France and the USA. However, in 2004 the Irish Government cancelled plans to use NEDAP machines for the European elections due to concerns that they do not produce a paper record of the way a vote was cast, and which are used in case of a dispute or re-count.

The SDU system which was demonstrated to the Committee was a touch screen system. The company leases the machinery and software to customers and delivers them to the polling stations on election day. The new system will be used in 2006.

Discussions are underway with regard to electronic voting in Denmark but voting centres are reluctant to bear the costs of machines.

In Belgium, the electronic voting system has been designed to closely mimic the manual system. Voters insert a card into a machine, make their choices by touching the screen with a pen and deposit their card in a ballot box. The ballot box performs an automatic count and voting cards are retained in the box in the event that a recount is necessary.

We were assured that this system is very simple to use and has met with little resistance from any sectors of the electorate.

***Members may wish to consider whether they require further evidence on electronic voting. For example, regarding issues of security and cost and orientation.***

### *3.2.2. Access and Absent Voters*

Mobile ballot boxes are used in both Denmark and the Netherlands for people who have difficulty in getting to the polling station.

In Denmark, voters who are going to be absent may vote in advance at the registration centre. In the Netherlands a voter may vote by proxy by getting another voter to vote on their behalf in the same polling station or apply to the mayor to vote at another polling station.

In the Netherlands voters who are abroad have used postal voting. They can now vote through the internet.

In Belgium, proxy voting is allowed but voters have to register their proxy through the Town Hall. As voting in Belgium is compulsory, voters who will be absent on the day of an election are able to cast their votes in advance at their local Town Hall.

### 3.2.3. Reports

In the Netherlands a report is prepared for every polling station which picks up on any complaints or irregularities. These are sent back to the Electoral Council and a full report goes to House of Representatives.

***The Committee may wish to consider which practices used in the voting process in the countries visited could improve current practice in elections in the UK and identify any it wishes to consider more fully.***

## 3.3 Participation

### 3.3.1 Participation of young people

Anne Birte Pade from the Election Unit stated that voting was a strong social norm in Denmark. Furthermore, Denmark has been successful in mobilising hard to reach groups in society and young people. Danish electoral institutions, such as the political parties, facilitate the mobilisation of weak groups.

Danish schools have elected councils made up of two representatives per class. The Education team from Copenhagen Council thought that Council Committees should encourage school councils to give evidence to committee hearings. The council had written a handbook, *The Pupil's Guide to Democracy*. There is an expectation in Denmark that young people will take part in activities outside school and external organisations tend to replicate the democratic decision making structures in the schools. The young people that the Committee met indicated a strong expectation that they should vote.

In Denmark the profits from gambling are channelled towards youth organisations and both the party youth groups that the Committee met received funding from the Government through the Danish Youth Council. This means that they are independent from the 'parent' parties. The Conservatives have around 2,000 members and the Liberals around 3,000. The party groups will go to schools to recruit and to participate in meetings at election time.

***Members may wish to take further evidence from local authorities and youth bodies involved in political education in Wales. They may further wish to talk to the youth sections of Welsh political parties about recruitment, funding and their activities.***

### 3.3.2 Compulsory voting

Voting in all Belgian elections is compulsory and has been so for more than a century. There are various sanctions that can be imposed on non-voters, ranging from fines to, after three instances of non-voting, being banned from voting for a set period. The taking of action against non-voters is at the discretion of the local mayor's office. Of the 8% of voters who did not vote in the last national election, around 1% had action taken against them.

### **3.4. Recognising Diversity in Electoral Arrangements**

In Denmark there are 74 Local Integration Councils. The Council of Ethnic Minorities is elected from the local councils. Part of the work of the Councils is to familiarise new immigrants with the political system and to encourage participation.

There are no special arrangements for non-Danish speakers as a legal requirement but some municipalities may make provision for voters in other languages.

The city of Brussels is officially bi-lingual. Each linguistic group (Walloon and Flemish) has its own voting list and, in many cases, its own candidates. In Belgium as a whole, there are three linguistic areas, Flemish, Walloon and German. Each has its own list and candidates. In each area, the voting list is only produced in the official language of that area.

There are no special arrangements for voters whose native tongue is not the official language of their voting region for national and local elections. Guidance for European elections, where any EU national can vote is produced in English and German.

There was an assumption in all three countries that, in order to be eligible to vote (either by gaining nationality or residency qualifications) a certain proficiency in the language of their adopted country was displayed by voters.

***The Committee may wish to consider which practices used for taking account of the diverse needs of voters in the countries visited could improve current practice in elections in the UK and identify any it wishes to consider more fully.***

**Members' Research Service  
3 October 2005**

## Annex C

### LGPS(2)-08-06(p12)

**Date:** Wednesday 17 May 2006

**Venue:** Committee Room 2, Senedd, National Assembly for Wales

**Title:** Local Government and Public Services Committee's Visit to Sweden

#### Purpose

1. This paper gives an account of the visit undertaken by the Local Government and Public Services Committee to Sweden between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The aim of the visit was to look at local service delivery in Sweden and the way in which local government is funded there with a view to informing its responses to the Reports of the Beecham Commission and the Lyons Inquiry.

#### Local Government in Sweden

2. The Committee decided to visit Sweden because it was particularly interested in the delivery of services at a very local level. Local Government in Sweden is made up of 290 municipalities (*kommun*). The size of municipalities can range from the very small (population 2,500) to large conurbations (Stockholm municipality is 760,000). They are responsible for providing a major part of all public services. The specially regulated tasks that municipalities are required to provide include:

- education,
- social services,
- care of the elderly,
- care of people with physical or intellectual disabilities,
- physical planning and building,
- certain environmental tasks and rescue services

3. There are also 21 counties (*Landsting*) whose main task is health care. Except for a small number of privately owned hospitals, the county councils operate all the hospitals in Sweden. The county councils are responsible for medical care services at hospitals and for outpatient care provided at district health centres. The outpatient care system also includes maternity and child health centres. In addition, the county councils are responsible for public dental services and psychiatric care.

4. Municipalities and county councils levy local income tax and determine the tax rate. The average, overall local tax rate is 30%. Approximately 20% goes to the municipalities and 10% to the county councils. Tax revenue is the largest source of income for the local authorities and constitute approximately two-thirds of their total income. Taxes are collected centrally by the Swedish Tax Agency and an equalisation system operates to address disparities between local authorities' tax capacities. A funding principle also exists that requires the State, if it decides to impose new tasks on the local authorities

and county councils/regions, to also provide the funds required to carry out these tasks.

5. Sweden also has a system of County Administrative Boards, each headed by a County Governor. Although co-terminous with the counties they are effectively a branch of central government and as such are accountable to Government Ministers. They have a supervisory and regulatory role with regard to local government, as well as being responsible for functions such as running elections and issuing driving licenses.

6. The structure of Swedish local government could be subject to change in the near future. The 21 counties could be replaced by between 6-10 regions which would have enhanced powers, for example with regard to strategic planning and transport. A pilot is currently underway in the Malmö area.

### **The Committee Visit**

7. Four Members of the Committee took part in the visit: the Chair, Ann Jones AM, Sue Essex AM, Mike German AM and Dai Lloyd AM. They were accompanied by the Committee Clerk, Virginia Hawkins and the MRS Researcher, Alys Thomas.

8. The Committee began its visit at the urban municipality of Västerås which is located about an hour's drive from Stockholm. It has a population of around 130,000 and is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest municipality in Sweden and is currently controlled by a Social Democrat/Left coalition. The Committee met with and received presentations from the Acting Director, an Elected Member from the Moderate (conservative party) and an official who gave a presentation on finance. Also in attendance was the International Co-ordinator.

9. The discussion covered the structure of the council which reflects a 'purchaser/provider' split and the breakdown of expenditure on services. 28% of the municipality's budget goes on compulsory (up to 16) schooling and 18% on care and social services. In response to Committee members' questions about local delivery and co-operation with other municipalities, the Swedish contingent said that there had been a move away from very localised delivery within the last decade on the grounds of efficiency. Co-operation with other local authorities is strictly regulated by the Local Government Act and requires a legal organisation to be established. However, co-operation does take place, for example, in the provision of fire and emergency services. It is also possible for authorities to purchase services from others.

10. The Committee then visited an open door drug rehabilitation centre and received a presentation about its structure and its work. While the centre is run by the municipality, some staff (for example, the doctor) are funded by the county because of its responsibilities for health.

11. The Committee then travelled to the municipality of Nykvarn which has a population of 8,238. While it has a rural setting, in fact it is a dormitory settlement for nearby towns and for Stockholm. It is currently controlled by a coalition of the local Nykvarn Party, the Moderate Party and the Centre Party.

The Committee met with elected members and officials and received a presentation.

12. The municipality has 3 schools, 7 pre-school/day care centres and 1 nursing home. It buys 270 post-16 education places from two nearby urban municipalities. 59% of the municipality's budget is spent on compulsory and post-16 schooling. The Committee visited one of the schools which caters for around 400 pupils between the ages of 6 and 16 and were given a tour by the headmistress.

13. The Committee then visited a Folk School. These are small, often residential, adult schools which are found across Scandinavia. There are currently 148 in Sweden. They tend to be run by voluntary organisations although they receive grants from the counties and from central government. The school visited by the Committee was run by the National Temperance Society. The Committee met and held discussions with the headmistress.

14. On the second day the Committee visited SALAR, the Swedish Local Government Association and received a presentation of local government finance in Sweden. The official who delivered the presentation had been involved in designing the equalisation system.

15. The Committee then met with the Principal Secretary to the Committee of Public Sector Responsibilities. This is a parliamentary committee set up by the Government and is made up of officials, politicians and experts. Its remit is to examine the ability of public administration in Sweden to meet welfare commitments and to propose changes in structure. Any proposals would adhere to the Swedish Social Model which includes many tasks being delivered at a local level and a tradition of local self-government. The final report of the Committee is not expected until early 2007.

16. The Committee met with the staff of the Stockholm County Administrative Board who explained their role in supervising and regulating the municipalities.

17. On the final morning the Committee met with staff from the Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) which is an NGO aimed at promoting democracy and which publishes widely on issues such as electoral turnout across states and electoral processes. The Committee discussed levels of voting among young people with IDEA staff as this is part of the remit of its scrutiny project on electoral arrangements.

18. The Committee was accompanied to its meetings by Anna Komheden from the British Embassy in Stockholm and on the second night attended a dinner hosted by the Ambassador.

**Action:** For the Committee to Note

## Annex D

### South Wales West Regional Committee Minutes (SWaWR(2)-02-05)

**Meeting date: Friday 14 October 2005**

**Meeting time: 9.30am to 12.15pm**

**Meeting venue: Civic Centre, Neath**

#### Assembly Members in Attendance

Assembly Member	Constituency
Peter Black	South Wales West
Janet Davies (Chair)	South Wales West
Brian Gibbons	Aberavon
Edwina Hart	Gower
Dai Lloyd	South Wales West
Val Lloyd	Swansea East
Gwenda Thomas	Neath

#### In Attendance

Name	Representing (if applicable)
Cliff Croft	Neath Port Talbot Access Group
Yvonne Hurcombe	Wales Pensioners
Margaret Minhinnick	Sustainable Wales

#### Committee Service in Attendance

Name	Job title
Jane Westlake	Committee Clerk
Claire Morris	Deputy Committee Clerk

#### Apologies were received from:

Assembly Member	Constituency
Alun Cairns	South Wales West
Andrew Davies	Swansea West
Janice Gregory	Ogmore
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend

#### Item 1: Welcome, Introduction and Election of Chair

1.1 The Chair welcomed Committee Members and members of the public.

1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

#### Item 2: Scrutiny of Electoral Arrangements in Wales

2.1 The Chair said that the views received would be fed back to Ann Jones, Chair of the Local Government and Public Services Committee.



2.2 Yvonne Hurcombe made a presentation on behalf of Wales Pensioners. A copy of her presentation is attached at Annex 1.

2.3 In response to questions from Members, Yvonne Hurcombe made the following points:

- Returning Officers should have more powers to investigate electoral fraud
- Fraud could be reduced if people were required to provide evidence of identification and their date of birth when voting.
- The role of the police in monitoring elections should be expanded.
- Political parties' policies were now more closely aligned which made it more difficult for people to decide for whom to vote.
- Active citizenship and politics should be taught in schools so that young people understood why they should vote.

2.4 **Supt Cliff Filer**, Neath Port Talbot Division, South Wales Police, said that the police did have a role in monitoring elections and it was a duty he and his officers took very seriously.

2.5 **Frank Little**, Chair of the local Liberal Democrats, said that one reason for people not registering to vote was the increased use of the electoral register for commercial purposes. He also felt that postal voting fraud was widespread: the Birmingham case was only the tip of the iceberg. He also believed that use of IT and on-line voting would provide more opportunities for corrupting the vote.

2.6 **Dennis Little**, Ystradgynlais Town Council, said that there had always been a problem in getting people to vote and politicians did not help themselves by attracting so much adverse publicity.

2.7 **Roger Knight**, University of the Third Age, said that Wales has a measure of proportional representation in the Assembly elections, but this had resulted in the Assembly Government not having a clear majority.

2.8 **Tim Palmer**, National Union of Students Wales, said that as young people had been identified as the least likely group to vote, lowering the voting age to 16 and making citizenship part of the national curriculum (as is the case in England), might encourage higher turnout amongst young people.

2.9 Cliff Croft made a presentation on behalf of Neath Port Talbot Access Group. A copy of his presentation is attached at Annex 2.

2.10 Edwina Hart, Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, said that a report had been prepared for the Assembly on the shortage of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and it was hoped that funding would be made available to train more.

2.11 Margaret Minhinnick, of Sustainable Wales, made a presentation. A copy is attached at Annex 3.

2.12 **Dawn Gullis**, Mencap Cymru, said that she had received evidence from people with learning disabilities that although they wanted to vote their support workers would not take them to the polling station.

2.13 Edwina Hart, Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, said that she would ask her officials to look into this.

2.14 **Janice Dudley**, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, asked Members for their views about the White Paper proposals to stop Assembly Members standing for both constituencies and regions.

2.15 **Cllr John Warman**, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, said that clarification was needed between local, national, Assembly and European elections. People were motivated differently for the different levels of government. Children under the age of 16 are not allowed into polling stations, so 16-year olds would not be prepared for the process of voting. He also felt that electronic voting would not provide a substitute for actually going out to vote.

2.16 **Alderman Morlais Thomas**, Gorseinon Town Council, said that disabled access had improved but it took time, as public bodies did not always have sufficient funds to make improvements quickly enough.

2.17 **Ivor Rees**, University of the Third Age, said that proportional representation would be more appropriate as more candidates were now standing for election. The Assembly should now have eighty members elected through the single transferable vote.

2.18 **Pat Dunmore**, Communities that Care, said that a survey her organisation had undertaken found that a large proportion of young people felt they did not have the opportunity to get involved in making decisions that affected them. School councils were a step forward but tended only to involve young people who were already engaged. The voting age should be reduced to 16.

2.19 **Ray Thomas**, Carers' Action Movement, highlighted the difficulties many carers faced in trying to vote.

2.20 **Yvonne Hurcombe**, Chair of Care of the Critically Ill, asked about palliative care for non-cancer patients with progressive, life limiting illnesses.

2.21 Brian Gibbons, Minister for Health and Social Services, said that a specialist fund for palliative care had been established and acknowledged that this should have been linked to the commissioning process. He believed that it would be necessary to develop services for end of life, but this was some years off.

#### **Action**

*The Chair would send a copy of the minutes to the Chair of the Local Government and Public Services Committee.*

### **Item 3: Minutes**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May were agreed.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

The provisional date for the meeting was 17 March, but this was subject to confirmation.

#### **Committee Service October 2005**

##### **Annex 1**

Good morning ladies and gentleman. My name is Yvonne Hurcombe and I am here today in my capacity as Chairperson of Wales Pensioners. I would like to start by telling you a little bit about the organisation I represent.

The idea of providing support for older people was brought about more than 30 years ago. At that time the organisation was known as The Retired Members Association. The title changed 10 years ago to the Wales Pensioners. The objective was to campaign and lobby for the rights of the older person and we have been active in establishing forums in each of the counties in Wales and are presently based at Topic House in Townhill, Swansea. Mr Gordon Carruthers who was founder member and chairman has recently retired at the age of 87 years. Wales Pensioners is supported by the City and County of Swansea.

#### **Issue 1 - Voter Registration**

I believe that the main reason for not registering is Apathy. For various reasons people simply do not want to vote.

Other reasons could be a lack of understanding of the system and the politicians or not feeling valued.

In response to the question "Did you know it is compulsory to register to vote in the UK?" I believe it is compulsory to register and not registering could result in a fine of up to £1000, but voting is solely a matter of choice. It is not compulsory to vote only to register.

#### **Issue 2 - Low Turnout**

Reasons for low turnout could include

- Apathy - where they feel that their vote is not going to change anything.
- Transport - when there is no available transport to and from the polling station it becomes more difficult for the older voter. Many pensioners do not have their own vehicle and rely on others for transport.
- Some people rely on others for moral support and do not feel able to attend the polling station alone.

- Street cred - not being fashionable and peer pressure could be reasons for younger people not voting.

Ways of addressing these problems could include

- If transport were supplied by the local political party members then both the transport and moral support issues may be addressed.
- Non political marketing aimed at promoting the importance of voting. Perhaps aimed at the younger element of the population to overcome the effects of street cred, fashionable and adverse peer pressure.
- It may be beneficial to educate people to understand the reasoning behind voting not just as a duty but as a way of providing change.

### **Issue 3 - Ways of Voting**

Older people are wary of technology and also most people do not accept change very easily and feel safer and more comfortable with the system they are already familiar with.

Polling cards are generally easy to understand and do not appear to create too much of a problem. Large print may be an option to help partially sighted people.

People appear to be distrustful of the postal voting system. Many feel that there might be unscrupulous people who would sabotage the voting which I believe has occurred in the past.

Some people are unable to post the form and others are not confident that their votes will be safely delivered.

Also if the form has not been filled in properly the vote will be deemed invalid.

### **Issue 4 - Access**

Generally the issue of access to the polling stations was not a problem. However with some of the smaller venues use of a wheelchair was difficult.

As previously mentioned in Issue 2, transport to and from the venue can be a problem for some older or disabled people.

### **Issue 5 - Language**

In general it would appear that most people are able to understand the forms and the forms are available in languages required by most people.

I would also like to mention the following information which was obtained from the training officer at the Minority Ethnic Women's Network based in Swansea who mentioned:

- Cultural Issues - In some cultures women are excluded from decision making and therefore are not accustomed to voting and other forms of decision making.
- Education - It may be beneficial to understand the reasoning behind voting not just as a duty but as a way of providing change.
- Translation - A lot of meaning can be lost in translation. This should be taken into consideration when translation is used.
- Heritage and Culture - should be a factor when forms are being prepared.

I would like to close by thanking you for inviting me here to speak on behalf of the Wales Pensioners.

## **Annex 2**

### **Neath Port Talbot Access Group Local Government Elections**

There are several reasons why disabled people are discouraged from taking part in local elections:

- Lack of confidence in the ability of politicians and councils to make a difference to our lives
- Disabled people know little or nothing about candidate and party policies.
- Information is not provided in a suitable manner.
- Some disabled people have problems travelling to and from the polling station.
- There are problems accessing the polling station and its facilities.

What can be done to change minds?

- The local council should provide information about how it operates, what it has done and is planning to do, using a suitable media.
- e.g. I often receive complaints and comments from disabled people about service provision, but when it is explained that a budget has been allocated and certain things have been done on their behalf over the past five years; when budgets and the need for forward planning are explained, most people accept this and are more prepared to wait for their problems to be corrected, but not too long.
- Information must be provided in accessible media or it is wasted time and effort.
- Providing information includes making available printed material in a font size to suit individuals; Braille or in audio for people with visual impairments. Suitable font and background colour for people have certain forms of dyslexia.
- It must be remembered that people who are deaf like those with Learning disabilities, sometimes need simplified Grammar or BSL on Video or

DVD. A deaf interpreter can make a DVD as easily as an audio tape is made.

**One format does not meet all requirements.**

Having been prepared to supply information in requested alternative formats, Councils` should ascertain if the disabled person requires all future information in that format and send all future publications in the requested format. Records should be kept of the communication requirements, within Data Protection Act guidelines.

It is important that information is supplied for hard to reach people, such as housebound people and people without access to public transport.

Many think that councils are directly responsible for many health issues, the police, and transport, so an explanation of areas of responsibility is needed.

Councillors and officers should listen to comments about what has been done that satisfied disabled people and build on them.

Listen to their problems; if questions are asked and cannot be answered immediately tell them honestly when to expect a reply. The reply should tell them how, if and when their problems will be attended to, or there should be an acceptable reason why their needs cannot be met.

Again, People may fail to register because electoral registration forms are not understood as they are not provided or offered in alternative formats or help may be required to fill in the form.

This also may lead to failure to understand that it is compulsory to register.

There is need of a follow up visit when forms are not returned on time. Issuing authorities should be aware if alternative formats or help with form filling are required. Help is likely to be required by people who have visual impairments, learning disabilities or are deaf. Deaf people may need the help of a BSL interpreter.

Means of asking for help should be in large print in a prominent position on the forms.

There has never been contact information on registration forms for deaf people who need help understanding or form filling.

Deaf people use several forms of communication, minicom phones, video phones, text messaging, e-mail. Please try to accommodate them and ensure that Phone numbers are published. People with speech impairments may also need to use these forms of communication.

I do not know anyone that has yet received or been offered campaign literature in an alternative format.

Information on the literature never informs how a deaf person may make contact with the candidate or electoral officer.

Almost 20% of the population are unable to read newsprint, but candidates' election literature is frequently printed in small fonts with bad colour contrasts, indicating that candidates have not considered the needs of 20% of their potential voters.

Members attending events for ten years or more say that politicians have not been accompanied by BSL interpreters often there is no loop system, thus excluding Deaf people and people using hearing aids from the proceedings. Deaf persons' representatives point out that normally alternative formats are available such as large print, Braille and audio, plus Welsh and may be Punjabi, but never BSL on video or DVD.

As said earlier, one format does not meet everyone's needs.

Disabled people's personal needs must be catered for if they are expected to vote; politicians must make an effort to consider their needs when trying to woo voters.

Candidates or their representatives should make a greater effort to meet the people whom they are wooing.

Having found out about the council and the candidates the disabled person has decided to vote. The decision now is does he or she use a postal vote, or attend the polling station.

If using a postal vote, who will help to fill it in?  
Some may use a website to cast a vote if this option were available.

As many are independent and would preferably attend the polling station; it is necessary to ascertain if the polling station is accessible for all.

This information should be available for disabled people on request in appropriate format via the registration form.

Information provided should state details of physical access; e.g. level or ramped entrance; availability of a loop system for hearing aid users; help for deaf people; large print voting papers or magnifiers or other assistive facilities for people with visual impairments; suitable height and width polling booths for wheelchair users, the polling booths should be well light, and very important for disabled people; understanding and helpful polling clerks.

Consider allowing people to have a choice of polling stations if the local one is unsuitable.

A survey carried out by Scope at the time of the Assembly elections, having received reports on a tenth of them revealed that over 75% of polling stations in Wales failed to meet the needs disabled people in one or more ways.

In Neath Port Talbot the percentage is far better because the council has discussed arrangements following previous elections and worked to make improvements.

If happy with the proposed access and facilities at the polling station, means of transport have to be considered. All is OK if you have your own or access to a friend's vehicle. The candidates literature or personal contact should have told the elector if in need of transport, how to contact a transport provider. Hopefully with transport free of charge.

### **Annex 3**

#### **Margaret Minhinnick comments on the Issue of low electoral voting**

##### **Introduction**

I am pleased to be involved today and am speaking from my experience establishing Friends of the Earth Cymru and after 10 years leaving to set up Sustainable Wales (SW). Our future is dependent upon action to protect the environment and the involvement of informed citizens who contribute to the decision-making process. This I believe will re-engage citizens in local politics and create a stronger foundation for sustainable communities. This is fundamental to the debate today.

Indeed 2 major all Wales events were organised by SW before the first Assembly elections and after the first year of operation called 'Finding Our Voices'. Over 400 people attended from all walks of life – their intention was to explore and challenge for more interesting, meaningful and fruitful ways of involving the community in local decision-making. (Reports available on [www.sustainablewales.org.uk](http://www.sustainablewales.org.uk))

The creation of the National Assembly was a significant event – part of the process of bringing government closer to the people, but is it? Are our voices really heard any more than they ever were? Do our contributions change anything? Power is too centralised in Westminster and people have no control over their local affairs. Many politicians in Wales, I think, believe they are involving people in the democratic process - but it's a too shallow involvement. It softens up and appeases - but it's not effective in most cases. It tends to involve the usual suspects, like myself – but what about all the others who are disengaged, disillusioned, or disadvantaged? A wider social grouping is necessary.

Why should we complain that people don't vote for political parties when those parties do not represent their interests and are not interested in them? For too many politicians, politics is the great incestuous game of power. People sense – often correctly – that what politicians are interested in, is politics. (only 2% of population belong to a political party and few are active)

We should also ask what are people voting for when they vote? Too often it seems to be the maintenance of a self-perpetuating establishment, whether



Labour or Conservative. For example – the Labour Party in 1997 maintained the previous government's spending programme.

Voting is the pinnacle of **citizenship**, it might be said. But we are citizens of what? A consumer state? Tescoland? A country that invaded Iraq against the wishes of the majority?

Consider the Iraq invasion. The official UK opposition – the Conservatives – were even more eager for it than the Labour government.. **No major party spoke for the majority – an astonishing state of affairs.** Many young people were against the invasion. Have they already been alienated from the voting process?

There is a disconnect between the Westminster village and locally.

Politician's ways of 'doing politics' is not interesting, it is not exciting, there is no vision, or passion - they have a low regard and have lost our trust.

No – we should not berate people for not voting. We should blame instead the political parties for disenchanting so many of the population. Blame politics, not the people.

People vote if they sense they have a stake in things. But with power so firmly exercised by big business and bewildering bureaucracies, people increasingly feel ignored. Therefore, they ignore politics - and that's to the detriment of our society.

**To comment on some of the questions posed:-**

### **1. Registration**

\* I can't say that I was really aware that voting was compulsory, registering to vote can seem bureaucratic to certain people - those with learning difficulties; those who find the forms difficult.

Conversely, registration by household can invite problems – why should a wife be registered by her husband (or vice versa?)

\* Maybe people should be encouraged to register to vote just as now they register with doctor or dentist – especially if they move away.

### **2. Low Turn out? Fewer People Voting**

- Greater mobility – more people move away from their communities, maybe moving frequently. Is it difficult to keep up with them?

\* People will vote in Welsh Assembly elections when they feel that Welsh Assembly members have real power and can make important decisions. Until then, turn out will be very low. They sense power is far too centralised and controlled by successive elites.

- As with Iraq, people might find little to choose between the parties. Maybe people want to vote but for “**none of the above**”. Again, maybe we should not be asking why people don’t vote. What we should be asking instead is why the political parties cannot attract voters or enthuse them. Is our party system outmoded? Is it behind the times for contemporary society?
- But consider this - Even when 70 – 80 percent of people voted – was that such a good thing? It created a political monoculture in various parts of the UK – such as the south Wales valleys. With hindsight, maybe this was not healthy for the area. There are many county boroughs in Wales today where one party has a stranglehold – even with only 30 percent voter turnout. Maybe people fail to vote because of this “iron grip” certain parties have in certain areas.
- Lowering the voting age to 16 could attract young people before they are preoccupied with other priorities and this could get them started.

### 3. Ways of Voting

Provision of more convenience and choice when voting is no bad thing -as long as there is no potential for coercion and it is still secret.

- Text or Internet voting would be attractive to the young – who are now poor voters. But text etc would not attract older voters – though the majority of these already vote.
- Might text / internet etc voting be subject to fraud – as we have seen with postal voting?
- There would be a need to be mindful of sectors of young people who could not afford or unable to implement the technology.- a digital deficit.
- Could there be an expansion of places to vote. At work? Via computer in the supermarket? But are we saying our lives are now so busy we cannot spare the time for the ritual of a visit to the polling station. This would seem very depressing.
- What about travelling polling stations? (Like travelling libraries and supermarket deliveries to homes?)
- Attracting young people might be done via new technology. But we should ask whether young people find anything relevant in any of the parties pronouncements. Youth are not prominent within the political parties where is Young Labour or the Young Conservatives, etc. ? **Do we need A NEW PARTY for young people?**

**Or, for instance, should it be mandatory that a certain proportion of any local authority councillors should be aged under 50; under 40; under 30. And that 50% are female?**

#### 4.Voting stations

- Maybe the booths could be made more welcome. They are austere places. What about music? Refreshments? A chance of political debate after voting has taken place in 'discussion lounges' in schools, church halls, etc where you could exchange views. Indeed, is voting a severe anti-climax? Could we do other things at the polling stations?

\* As to voting places - why not voting in Libraries? Then, we have attracted people who might stay and browse.

#### 5.Language

- The forms might be re-designed and made instantly understandable. They should look important, modern and fresh. The words, "VOTING CARD" in big letters, with your name & address, etc.
- **HOWEVER, IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING IT EASY BUT ABOUT MAKING IT IMPORTANT.**
- **VOTING IS NOT THE ONLY WAY TO GAIN DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION.**

Voting could be augmented by other procedures. It is not the only way to engage with the citizen. Isn't society telling us that it wants to move from a representative style of democracy to a more participatory style of democracy one where there is more sharing of power or ownership of decision-making?.

Locally people need to be seen to be involved in agenda setting **and** the final decision. Citizens need to influence both these stages.

Often the decision has already been taken by the political authority about how much scope there will be for public involvement - there is no sharing of power. A **deepening** of citizen participation is required.

For instance:

Community Consultation techniques are used to elicit opinion, build capacity and extract new ideas throughout the year - but care needs to be taken not to overload.

e.g. Roundtable debates, planning for real, citizen's juries/panels, community visioning, participatory theatre, referenda, etc, etc.

- Candidates could be interviewed by Citizens' Juries in full view of a local audience.
- A written and oral exam would be set for candidates every 5 years to check knowledge and passion!

- Training would be provided for local councillors on urgent issues. - or for particular entire community/county borough councils, to get members up to scratch on issues such as Climate Change, Sustainable Development, Welfare Rights. Then voters would be more confident in their councillors.
- Facilitation to be done by independent experts to ensure fairness
- Resources and time are given to these type of processes.

**Suggested reading:**

**'Beyond the Ballot - 57 Democratic Innovations From Around The World'** was generated as evidence to, and published by, the **POWER Inquiry** – an independent inquiry into the state of Britain's democracy, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC.

**The POWER Inquiry** was established in 2004 to explore how political participation and involvement might be increased and deepened in Britain. Its investigation into Britain's political processes is based on the belief that a healthy democratic system requires the active participation of its citizens and that without this the vitality and legitimacy of its democracy is undermined.

See [www.powerinquiry.org](http://www.powerinquiry.org)



