# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE** | **Framework for electoral reform** |
| **DATE** | **15 July 2021** |
| **BY** | **Mick Antoniw, Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution** |

Since the devolution of elections policy in 2017, the Welsh Government’s reforms have focused on extending the franchise for devolved elections and improving the process for the annual canvass. To achieve this, two Acts were passed by the Senedd, alongside a major piece of secondary legislation.

As we move into the sixth Senedd, the time is now right to accelerate our reform agenda and start to realise our ambitions to modernise electoral administration in Wales. This means moving into the complex territory of how and when people vote, how they are registered, the information available to them and enabling everyone who wants to register or vote to do so.

It is important to underpin this reform agenda with a clear framework with a set of principles. This will also be the foundation of our responses to electoral reform across the UK. This demonstrates our reforms are principles-based, coherent, meaningful and aimed at what is best for voters. It also illustrates both the value of devolution and the values of social justice at the heart of this Government.

Electoral reforms must be set within a wider context. Firstly, we must consider the ability of electoral and democratic reform to play a pivotal role in achieving the strategic goals of the Welsh Government. Participating in democracy is strongly linked to improved outcomes. Supporting people in overcoming barriers experienced because of their socio-economic conditions is essential to achieving our overall aim of improving participation rates and experiences. When considering policy changes or interventions we must consider them through this lens; it is essential that we put in place measures to support reducing the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantages.

Similarly, participation in democracy by people with protected characteristics are far lower than those without. We also need to consider how this intersects with the socio- economic duty. All electoral reforms will need to focus on equity of participation, taking approaches such as the social model of disability as a foundation and ensuring the National Goals of the Well-being and Future Generations Act are embedded in policy solutions and initiatives.

We believe all electoral reforms should be underpinned by the Ways of Working set out in the Well-being and Future Generations Act. We therefore commit to designing reforms in collaboration with stakeholders, thereby giving us the benefit of the experiences of those that best understand the barriers to democracy. We will work with the people of Wales and expert organisations to ensure that policy solutions are solving real problems faced by citizen and are actively removing barriers to participation.

The principles set out below reflect the values of social justice and the value we place upon democracy in Wales. As a Government we will use them to benchmark our electoral reform agenda and our approach to supporting democratic engagement and participation more widely. We ask others involved in delivering elections to use them as the benchmark when considering how they manage the electoral process from registration through to the announcement and recording of results.

The principles are:

* + **Equity:** Every person that wishes to participate in democracy must be enabled to do so, and to do so in a safe and respectful environment, so that our institutions are diverse and representative of the people they serve.
  + **Accessibility:** Changes to electoral systems and electoral law should be based on the principle of making voting and participation in democracy as accessible and convenient as possible, building capacity to allow that to happen and encouraging creativity at every level of democracy.
  + **Participation:** We want as many people as possible to exercise their democratic right to vote. It is the role of everyone involved in electoral administration to maximise the number of people turning out at elections.
  + **Improving citizen experience:** Citizens should be provided with the tools to shape their communities and country through engagement, representation and participation.
  + **Simplicity:** The administrative electoral system and electoral law in Wales must be modernised to make registering to vote, voting and participating more straightforward for citizens.
  + **Integrity:** Integrity and transparency must underpin all electoral reforms in Wales. We must have a system that citizens trust and a sharing of information from legitimate sources.

A healthy democracy means empowering the citizens of Wales to engage with democratic institutions in many different ways and recognising that participation and using your democratic voice extends beyond the act of voting. If citizens feel empowered to participate and do not face barriers to this participation they are more likely to engage.

Valuing democracy requires investment, not just investment in the principles of electoral reform but investment in the infrastructure and people that support the safe and secure delivery of elections and provide opportunities to participate in democracy. It will also require investment beyond the Welsh Government, we must work with local government to ensure that democracy is an appropriately resourced key service and is able to provide the support Welsh citizens need to actively participate. We and local government must be prepared to invest in technological solutions that will support breaking down barriers to participation as well as supporting better information, engagement and outcomes for the people of Wales.