

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

Report To Powys County Council 7th December 2023

REPORT AUTHOR: Councillor James Gibson Watt (Leader of Council)

REPORT TITLE: Consideration of Single Transferable Voting system

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

To allow Council to reconsider the issue of a possible move a Single Transferable Voting (STV) system (as opposed to the current first past the post system) following consideration by the Democratic Services Committee on 16th November 2023.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members will recall that the Monitoring Officer took a report to Full Council on 5th October 2023 for Council to consider whether or not it wished to consider moving to an STV system of voting at future local elections, the first step being to go out to consultation with persons entitled to vote as electors at a local government election, Town and Community Councils and such other persons as the Council considers appropriate. Council resolved to ask for the issue to be discussed by the Democratic Services Committee before the issue is brought back to Council. STV was discussed by the Democratic Services Committee on 16th November 2023. The comments and recommendation of the Democratic Services Committee are found at Appendix 3.
- 2.2 Sections 8 and 9 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ("the 2021 Act") allows local authorities in Wales to choose to adopt the Single Transferrable Voting system ("**STV**") as the type of electoral system to be used after 2027 instead of the current First Past the Post System ("**FPTP**"). FPTP is currently used for county or county borough council elections in all 22 local authorities in Wales.
- 2.3 Prior to the 2021 Act coming into force, Welsh Government commissioned research exploring the introduction of the STV system in future local elections in Wales. A copy of the WG summary of the research is attached as Appendix 1, a full copy of the research is found at Appendix 2 and the Monitoring Officer's summary of the full research is at Appendix 4.

3. What is a Single Transferrable Voting system (STV)?

- 3.1 STV is a form of proportional representation used in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Malta, Scotland, Estonia and Australia for some of their elections.
- 3.2 Under STV, political parties may nominate several candidates for a multi-member ward and voters can choose between those candidates and independents.
- 3.2 If the County Council decides to adopt STV for its 2027 election or for elections at a later date, the following are the main changes:
- At present there are 52 single member wards and 8 multi member wards. Under STV each new electoral ward would have no less than 3 councillors but no more than 6 councillors, the number to be determined by Welsh Government upon recommendations from the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (“the Boundary Commission”). The boundary Commission would make recommendations to Welsh government based upon their aim of establishing, in so far as it is possible to do so, wards with a similar number of constituents per councillor which reflect local communities. The council would in future have between 12 and 23 wards instead of the current 60 wards but would retain 68 councillors.
 - The process is not the same as that currently used or proposed by the Welsh Government for elections to the Welsh Parliament, nor that previously used for the Police & Crime Commissioner elections.
 - Under STV voters rank candidates in order of preference i.e. voters would place “1” next to their favourite candidate, “2” next to the second favourite and so on. There would be no obligation to follow party ‘slates’.
 - Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they wish.
 - To be elected, candidates must reach a Quota, calculated according to the number of seats and the number of votes cast and set out in the regulations.
 - Ballot papers are sorted into first preference votes. Candidates reaching the Quota are immediately elected:
 - Surplus votes from candidates reaching the quota are reallocated to second preference candidates;
 - The candidates with the fewest first preference votes who do not reach the quota are eliminated. Their votes are reallocated to second preference candidates as set out in regulations;

- Following the reallocation of votes, candidates reaching the quota are in turn elected. Their surplus votes are then reallocated until all vacancies are filled.
- Where no candidate reaches the quota, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and their votes transferred to the remaining candidates until the number of candidates remaining is the same as the number of vacancies to be filled.
- While manual STV counts may take longer than under our present system, the experience in Northern Ireland is that some councils complete their count in one day, others take two days and some choose to do it over two days. Longer counts are normally only required in national elections where the electorate and the turnout is much larger.

4. The Process to Move to STV

4.1 If Full Council were to decide that it would like to consider moving to the STV system, the following process should be followed:-

- A decision taken by a simple majority of Council to consult with voters, each Town and Community Council and with other appropriate persons or bodies;
- Council considers the results of the consultation process and decides whether or not to adopt the STV system for its 2027 local elections. **In order for Council to make this decision at least a 2/3 majority of the total number of Members in full council will be required;**
- The 2021 Act requires the Council to make such a decision by the **15th November 2024** if STV is to be used for the 2027 elections, so as to allow sufficient time for the Boundary Commission to undertake the necessary work and to make recommendations on boundary changes to Welsh Government;
- A decision to move to STV following the consultation must be taken at a meeting which is specifically held for that purpose (ie no other Council Business) and the agenda for the meeting must be published at least 21 days before the date of the meeting;
- Welsh Ministers and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission must be notified of the decision to move to STV within 14 days of the date of the resolution;
- If the Councils opts to change to STV, it will be used for the next two rounds of ordinary local elections as a minimum;

- Appendix 2 sets out research by the Welsh Government of the experience of STV elections in other Local Elections. This will help to inform debate during any consultation period leading up to the Council taking a final decision.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 The Council is required to consult with those entitled to vote in local elections and with town and community councils. How that consultation is done is not set out in the regulations.

5.2 While a separate mailshot to every household may cost up to £50k, there is no requirement to do that, and with the current budgetary pressures on the council this is not an expenditure which the cabinet could support.

5.3 Using similar means of consultation as the Council uses for many other consultations that it carries out, through the media, social media, public meetings and the Council's website, the costs should not exceed £10,000. The recent consultation on Leisure Services provision for example, which achieved a high response rate, cost less than £10,000.

5.4 Current costs incurred for the Count are around £27.5k for one day. If a STV count needed to take place over a second day provision will be needed for that in the budget for 2027/28.

5.5 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) confirms that additional budget would need to be identified to meet the costs of the consultation exercise. Should Council decide to consult, the additional pressure would be added to the Council's budget plan for consideration at budget setting.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring officer has commented as follows: "The requirements of Sections 8 and 9 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 will be followed and as such the recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view."

7. Recommendation

7.1 Recommended that Council resolves to allow the matter to be considered further following a statutory consultation process and to reach a final decision before 15th November 2024.

Appendix 1

Welsh Government research - summary

Appendix 2

Welsh Government research – full copy

Appendix 3

Democratic Services Committee Comments

Appendix 4

Summary of Research for Welsh Government