

MEETING	COUNCIL
DATE	7 December 2023
TITLE OF THE REPORT	Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 (“The Act”) - Option to adopt Single Transferable Vote (“STV”) System for Cyngor Gwynedd Elections.
RECOMMENDATION	That the Council decides whether it wishes to instigate a Process which could lead to the adoption of a Single Transferable Vote System for Cyngor Gwynedd elections
AELOD CABINET	Cllr Menna Trenholme
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1. Background

Section 5 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 permits any Principal Council to choose between two local government voting systems for Principal Councils:

- Simple majority system (“first past the post”)
- Single Transferable Vote system (“STV”)

This choice is available to each of the 22 Principal Councils in Wales individually. The Explanatory Note for the Local Government and Elections Wales Bill which sets out the legislative background is at Appendix 1.

2. STV System

2.1 STV is a preferential voting system and operates in multi-member constituencies. Voters rank candidates in order of preference by marking 1, 2, 3 etc against individual candidates’ names on the ballot paper. Candidates must obtain a certain quota of votes in order to be elected.

2.2 The following summarises the key aspects of the STV system which would be adopted. It resembles the Northern Ireland Assembly system, the “Gregory” system.

- Voters express their choice by ranking candidates in order of preference for the seats that are available. Therefore, numbering the candidates in the elector's order of preference on the ballot paper.
- Then a “quota” is established. This is based on dividing the number of valid ballot papers with the number of seats contested. If a candidate receives a number of first preference votes which is equal to or exceeds the quota they are elected.
- If all seats have not been filled after the first stage then the remaining votes of the successful first choice candidates over and above the quota are divided and re-sorted according to the electors second preferences as expressed on those papers. (A formula is applied in terms of counting the value of the votes that are transferred)

- If a combination of first and second preference votes for a candidate reaches the quota then they are elected.
- If there are empty seats remaining the process is repeated using the remainder of the votes until all seats have been elected.
- There is a procedure for removing candidates who cannot reach the quota and a procedure for electing the remaining candidates if there are still empty seats.

3. What is the process for changing systems?

3.1 Unless the Council decides to change the procedure and adopt a STV system the simple majority system will be utilised in Cyngor Gwynedd elections. This is a Full Council Decision that cannot be delegated. Any Principal Council in Wales can do this. It is not dependent on the decision or situation of any other Council. It could mean that one Council could have the current first past the post system whilst a neighbour could have an STV system This change is not open to Town and Community Councils who would continue with the current system notwithstanding the county decision. Certain steps must be followed before a decision on an alternative system can be made.

3.2 Before making a decision to change systems the Council must consult with:

- Every local government elector in the area
- Every town/community council
- Any other persons it considers appropriate to consult with

3.3 After consulting on the intention a meeting of the Full Council must be called specifically and only in relation to this decision. 21 Days prior notice of the meeting must be given. In order for a proposal to change systems to be adopted the number of members who vote in favour must be at least two thirds of the number of seats on the Council namely 46/69.

3.4 The decision must be made no later than the 15 November, three years before the election year. In the case of this term 15th November 2024. If the system is changed the power to change back cannot be exercised until after two local government elections. If a decision is made to change to STV , the Welsh Ministers and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission must be notified according to a specific form and timetable.

3.5 The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission will then receive instructions from Welsh Ministers to hold a review of the Council area. To implement the STV system it is a basic requirement to have multi-member wards. The Act stipulates that a ward must have a minimum of 3 members and a maximum of 6.

4. Observations

4.1. Boundaries

Every ward would need be a multimember ward. The Act sets out the range of seats which may be allocated (3-6). An element of this acknowledges that a high number of seats in a rural ward with a lower population density may mean that the geographical area might be very large.

4.2 Voting Arrangements

There will be a need to invest in notifying electors of the new system and how to vote.

4.3 Counting Arrangements

Ideally a STV system would use an electronic counting system. However, the Government acknowledges that such a system is very costly. Therefore, a STV system called the Simple Gregory Method is used which can be counted by hand. However, experience of hand counting from across the UK indicates that the process is laborious and the count process can take two days or more. There is also a need to acknowledge that spaces are required to store votes that may come in for further rounds of counting. A link to a short film on YouTube which explains the system as well as the reasoning provided by the Government for including the option in the Act.

Impact Assessment

There are no direct implications arising from the recommendations in this report. However, should Council determine to progress any changes to local election arrangements, a full equality and diversity impact screening exercise would be required.

5. Next Steps

There is no specific requirement for the Council to review its electoral arrangements. This represents a statutory power to initiate a process, if that was desired. However, it is considered important that the Full Council is given the opportunity to come to a position on the matter.

Recommendation

That the Council decides whether it wishes to instigate a Process which could lead to the adoption of a Single Transferable Vote System for Cyngor Gwynedd elections

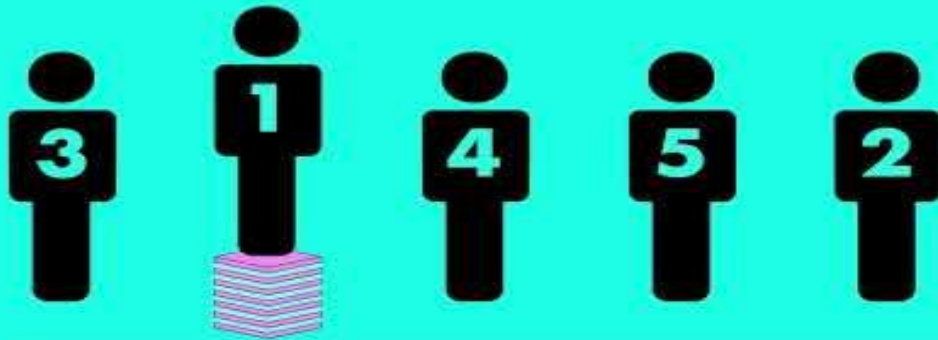
Monitoring Officer

Report Author

Finance Officer

“There is no financial commitment to the decision sought, which is to consider if the Council is to initiate a process that can lead to the adoption of a Single Transferable Vote system for Gwynedd Council elections. However, the statutory requirements involved in carrying out the process of change and introducing a new regime will inevitably result in additional one-time costs and possibly slightly higher permanent costs as well at election time. These costs have not yet been quantified, but I do not believe that they will affect the consideration of the decision sought.”

[Welcome to Your Vote - Voting Systems: Single Transferable Vote - Wales - YouTube](#)



or if they are elected with a lot more votes than the next candidate,

Appendix 1.

Explanatory Note for the Local Government and Elections Wales Bill.

“The voting system - choice of: first past the post or single transferable vote

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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