

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **23rd November, 2023**

Report Subject: **Single Transferable Vote**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas - Leader/Cabinet Member
Corporate Overview & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea Jones, Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	09/11/2023						23/11/2023	Member Briefing 31/10/2023

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the newly commenced powers for local authorities to change their voting system for local elections, and to seek the view of Members as to whether they are minded to commence the formal procedure to exercise the power to change.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Councillors are currently elected to principal councils using a simple majority system commonly known as First Past The Post (FPTP). Each council will continue to use this method unless it decides to change to a system known as the Single Transferable Vote (STV). The power to change only applies to principal councils – town and community councils would continue to use the current system (FPTP).
- 2.2 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (sections 8 and 9) sets out the steps a local authority must take if it was minded to change its' voting system. These sections came into effect on 6 May 2022.
- 2.3 Such a change would require a resolution supported by a two thirds majority of full council (22 members).
- 2.4 Before exercising the power to change the voting system, the local authority must consult local government electors, community councils and any other interested parties.
- 2.5 To change the voting system for the next set of local government elections in 2027, a Council resolution must be made before 15 November 2024.

- 2.6 If the Council makes a resolution to change the voting method, the Council will need to inform Welsh Ministers and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission. It is likely that Welsh Ministers would direct the Boundary Commission to carry out a review of the Council's boundaries. Provisions for initial reviews outlined in the Act requires that if a council adopts STV, the number of councillors for each electoral ward is to be no less than 3, but no more than 6. Blaenau Gwent currently has 9 wards with only 2 members.
- 2.7 If the change is agreed, councils are required to retain the STV voting system for the next two terms of Council (2027 and 2032) before it can reconsider its decision and revert back to FPTP.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

To retain the current First Past The Post voting system for local elections.

Option 2

To carry out a consultation exercise before bringing a report back to Council to consider changing the voting system which, would require a two thirds majority of Council before the voting system can be changed.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

Recent changes in legislation has afforded the opportunity to local councils to adopt an alternative method of voting which should be considered.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There is no additional impact on the budget allocated to an election using Option 1.

Option 2 may incur costs in carrying out a public consultation and further costs if STV is implemented.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Option 1 – Members with the highest numbers of votes are elected via FPTP which is not considered as fair as STV which is a form of proportional representation.

Option 2 – There is less understanding of the rules in relation to STV. The method of counting is a complex and lengthy process which can increase the number of rejected votes.

5.3 **Legal**

Local Elections are run in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 and subsequent legislated changes. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 allows local authorities to change its' voting system.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no human resource implications associated with this report.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

There are no health and safety implications associated with this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

A count using STV is complex and there is evidence that the number of spoilt votes increases. Under the rules, an STV count must be undertaken manually and this would therefore take longer to count as there is the potential for several rounds of counting to count surplus votes. It is expected that an STV count would extend to a second day of counting which will incur increased costs.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Should the new system be adopted, there will be implications for the public as the method used to count votes in local elections will be altered and could in some circumstances lead to different outcomes in terms of persons elected.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Before exercising its power to change the voting system, the local authority must consult local government electors, community councils and any other interested parties.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

N/A

6.5 **Preventative focus**

N/A

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

N/A

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

N/A

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

N/A

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

N/A

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

N/A

Background Documents /Electronic Links