



**IMPROVING
LOCAL DEMOCRACY
IN WALES**

**Report of the
Commission on
Local Government
Electoral Arrangements
in Wales**



July 2002

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Chair: Professor Eric Sunderland OBE

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1 Our Commission was established by the Welsh Assembly Government in June 2001 to examine and report on local government electoral arrangements in Wales. We interpreted our Terms of Reference broadly, consulted widely, and set our investigation in the context of the changing shape of Welsh local government brought about by the recent introduction of new political management arrangements in local authorities. In addition to considering the case for recommending some form of Proportional Representation (PR) for Welsh local government elections, we looked at a range of other matters, including levels of public participation in local elections as demonstrated by turnout and numbers of contested elections; methods of voting; frequency of elections; and councillor numbers. We paid particular attention to the need to promote equality of opportunity in our electoral arrangements. We make recommendations on all these matters. Unless indicated otherwise, our recommendations are unanimous.

Local Government and Local Elections Now

2 Local authorities provide a wide range of local services on which people rely, and effective local government is central to the quality of life of local people. Local government also has the distinctive characteristic of being an elected tier of authority, with its own democratic mandate and direct representation of local people by councillors. We continue to need able and dedicated people to offer themselves for this form of public service, and this will remain the case as Welsh local government reforms the way in which it discharges its functions.

3 Existing local government electoral arrangements are based on the election of members from electoral divisions, using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. In some authorities, each electoral division returns one member only, but in other authorities multi-member divisions are used and up to five members can be elected from a single division; other authorities again use a mix of single member and multi-member divisions. As an electoral system, FPTP has been criticised for producing results in which each political party's share of the votes across an authority's area is only rarely accurately reflected in its share of the seats; this disproportionality appears to be particularly likely to occur where multi-member electoral divisions are used.

4 In terms of composition of authorities, councillors in Wales typically are white, male, older than the average of the population, and retired. Fewer than 20% of Welsh councillors are women, and unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, there is no sign of this proportion increasing. Fewer than 1% of councillors in Wales are from an ethnic minority background.

5 Wales has a significantly higher proportion of uncontested local government elections than do other parts of the United Kingdom. These occur particularly in rural areas, but they are also quite common in more urban areas. In 1999, around 13% of the Welsh electorate had no opportunity to vote for their local councillors because the elections were not contested. Where elections were contested, turnout averaged around 47%, although in some authorities it dropped to around 40% and in others reached 60%. Overall, taking account of uncontested elections, around 41% of the Welsh electorate voted in the local elections in 1999.

Public Attitudes

6 We held public meetings in each of the local authority areas in Wales, and heard views from local people. Some told us that there was too much party politics in local government and that they would be less inclined to vote for political candidates, who would put party interests before those of local people. Others said that people did not vote because it served no useful purpose, and that it made no difference who was elected. Various reasons were given for this, including the suggestion that local government had lost too many powers to central government to have any worthwhile role, and that the electoral system itself produced too many "safe seats" for particular parties and so discouraged people who supported other parties from voting. We were also told that there was very little understanding of how local government worked and what role it played in a system of government in which there were so many different tiers of authority. Given this lack of knowledge, it was not surprising that local people did not see voting in local elections as important, although if a particular issue that would have an impact on them arose, it was still possible to engage people in local campaigns.

Improving Turnout

7 We recognise that voters will only want to use their opportunities to vote if they believe that the issues in local elections are important to them, and that their votes could be important in influencing possible outcomes. We want to create a better understanding of the importance of local government, and encourage better communication between local people and their councils. We therefore make recommendations in our Report, first to the Electoral Commission to run a public information campaign about government in Wales, and how local authorities fit into that structure; and secondly to local authorities themselves about improving local peoples', particularly young peoples', understanding of what councils and councillors are doing in each area to improve the local quality of life. Councils should also have well-established and publicised procedures for receiving and giving proper consideration to petitions from local people.

8 We believe that more needs to be done to provide information which might encourage people actually to vote. We recommend that better information is provided for young people on the practical aspects of voting, and we also

propose that the "freepost" facility is extended to local elections so that local voters can receive more information from local candidates about themselves and their policies. We consider it very important that barriers to voting are removed wherever possible; this is particularly relevant for disabled people, and we recommend that authorities should be required to prepare and implement elections accessibility strategies to provide disabled people with facilities for voting to the standard which other voters rightly expect. We also believe that the time has come to reduce the age at which individuals become entitled to vote in local (and so National Assembly) elections to 16, and we recommend that the law is changed accordingly.

9 Various things can be done to make it easier to vote in local elections. We recommend extending the voting hours for such elections to bring them into line with those which apply in parliamentary and Assembly elections. We ask the Electoral Commission to review the arrangements for postal voting so that people can use that facility more easily. We also recommend Welsh local authorities to begin considering now what innovative voting methods, particularly those using new technology, could be introduced for the next round of local elections in 2004. We are however opposed to any suggestion for introducing compulsory voting.

Encouraging More Candidates

10 We need more people in Wales to offer themselves for local elected public service. A particular consideration here is the need for a more diverse set of people to serve on local councils, to enrich local democracy with their different experiences and priorities. Although political parties have a key role in bringing forward candidates, they are not monopoly providers and we believe that local councils and the Welsh Assembly Government also have roles to play in encouraging a wider range of people to offer themselves as candidates. We make recommendations on the action which those bodies should take to achieve this, and we also recommend that town and community councils should be encouraged to advertise for individuals to offer themselves when co-option of members is being considered.

11 We are concerned that it appears very difficult to reconcile local authority membership with full-time employment. We make recommendations aimed at easing this difficulty, including more generous paid leave by public sector employers for employees wishing to undertake council service; encouragement to private sector employers to publish their policies on allowing employees time off for public service; and examination of the possibility of compensating private and voluntary sector employers for allowing their employees time off for council service. We believe that the Wales Charter for Councillors promulgated by the Welsh Local Government Association ought to command general support, and we recommend the Assembly Government to consult with interested bodies to see how it can be given full effect.

12 We also make recommendations on technical changes which could usefully be introduced to encourage more people to offer themselves for election. Fewer signatures should be required in support of candidatures, nomination forms should be more easily available and returnable, and the minimum age for candidates should be reduced from 21 to 18.

The Electoral System

13 We were asked to consider whether First Past The Post (FPTP) should be retained as the electoral system for local elections in Wales, or whether it should be replaced by some other system. Our recommendations on this represent the views of seven of the Commissioners; two take a different view.

14 We all consider that the new political management structures in our local authorities require strong checks and balances if they are to work effectively, and the electoral system must be able to produce members capable of providing these. The system must at the very least not discourage voters from turning out to vote, and should if possible produce more contested elections. It must allow for effective representation of local people by members identified with particular parts of an authority's area (and allow for non-party members to be elected if local people want that). The majority of us also believe that the system must be one which makes it more likely that the authority will in its membership reflect both the community's diversity of opinion and the diversity of local people and their different life experiences.

15 We tested seven electoral systems against these criteria. No one system can be said to satisfy each criterion fully, but the majority of Commissioners concluded that the Single Transferable Vote (STV) form of Proportional Representation is best suited to meeting the varying demands that local people make of the local electoral system. STV enables a diversity of opinion to be represented (and so provide checks and balances) in the council chamber by locally-elected councillors identified with particular electoral divisions. Each such division should normally elect between three and five members, and this should encourage parties to put forward slates of candidates reflecting the diversity of local populations, but it would not prevent non-party candidates being elected if they had sufficient local support. We believe that such a system will both reduce the number of uncontested seats and encourage more voters to use their votes, as there will be many fewer "safe seats"; we reject any suggestion that asking voters to mark their ballot papers in order of preference (ranking candidates 1,2,3,4, etc.) as STV requires should cause voters confusion and dissuade them from voting.

16 The majority of Commissioners therefore recommend that the STV system should be introduced in time for the local government elections in 2008; before then there will need to be legislation in Parliament to introduce the system, and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales will have to review the

existing local electoral boundaries and recommend new ones for the multi-member divisions which STV requires.

17 Two Commissioners believe that local authorities in Wales should continue to be elected using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, but they consider that electoral boundaries should be changed so that each electoral division elects one member only to the relevant council; multi-member divisions would be abolished. They believe that these arrangements would provide clearer and stronger accountability in local government, and achieve a direct link between local electors in an area and an individual councillor.

18 We all finally recommend that the existing broad pattern of councillor numbers in each authority should be retained; that local government elections should be held every four years, in different years from National Assembly elections; and that such elections should be conducted on a whole-council basis, with all members of councils elected on the same day.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 This is the report of a Commission appointed by the Welsh Assembly Government in June 2001 to examine existing arrangements for local elections in Wales. The appointment of the Commission followed agreement between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in the National Assembly for Wales in October 2000 to form a partnership administration; one of the provisions of the partnership agreement was that "a full independent review" would be established to look into "possible voting systems for Local Government elections in Wales, including those which would achieve greater proportionality in the representation of political parties". The membership of the Commission is set out in Appendix 1, and our Terms of Reference in Appendix 2. We were asked to report within one year from the date of our establishment.

1.2 Although we have occasionally been described in the media as "the PR Commission", examination of our Terms of Reference will show that our remit extended rather more widely than the issue of possible reform of the electoral system for local elections. We were, for example, asked also to look at existing arrangements for voting and whether they could be made easier for voters; at the frequency of local elections; and the numbers of councillors which each authority should have. We were asked to address these and other questions in the changing context of Welsh local government flowing from the introduction, under the heading of "executive arrangements", of new political management structures in each local authority.

1.3 We were required, too, in reaching our conclusions, to have in mind the still important tradition in parts of Wales of non-political local government, through the election of large numbers of Independent members; and we were also asked to consider, in determining the best local electoral arrangements, how local people could be represented in ways meeting their expectations and how a wide range of local interests could be reflected in council membership. We considered it essential to approach our task with a strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for those groups currently under-represented in, or distanced from, Welsh local government. Moreover, behind all this we always had in mind the fundamental health of local democracy in Wales, currently revealed in relatively low levels of voter turnout and high numbers of uncontested seats. This was, therefore, a difficult task, but one we entered into with enthusiasm, and with a clear commitment to a strong and effective tier of local government in Wales.

1.4 We consulted extensively before reaching our conclusions. Written evidence was invited from a wide range of local authority, political and voluntary organisations, as well as from Assembly Members and Members of Parliament. We also received responses from many individuals. A list of those submitting written evidence or comments to us is at Appendix 3. We established a bi-lingual web-site

and up to 12 June the number of visits to the site totalled over 10,000. The various submissions we received and the notes of meetings we held appear on that site. Following receipt of this written evidence, we took oral evidence from representatives of the political parties, the Welsh Local Government Association, and from academics and organisations expert in this field. We then visited each local authority in Wales, to hear the views of councillors of all political persuasions. Copies of the slides we used to introduce these discussions are at Appendix 4. We should note here that our visits to council chambers reminded us how poorly designed many still are in providing easy access for disabled people, and it is clearly essential that action is taken to remedy this, in the interests both of disabled councillors and other disabled people.

1.5 We also arranged public meetings in each local authority area; these (reflecting perhaps the decline of interest in local government that lies behind many of our recommendations) were generally not well-attended, but we still obtained useful and interesting insights from those who took the trouble to attend. We also contacted directly (by e-mail, letter and telephone) a variety of voluntary and representative organisations whose views we thought might be relevant to the exercise. Some of these submitted comments in writing, but we were disappointed that others, including the trade unions and some equality organisations, did not; since our Report is to be the subject of further consultation, we hope that these bodies will take that opportunity to contribute to the debate. On the other hand, we had very interesting and constructive meetings with a number of youth councils, school pupils and Age Concern Wales. We place on record here our thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to our work, whether by submitting evidence or meeting and discussing the issues with us.

The structure of our report is straightforward. We begin by describing the role and importance as we see it, of Welsh local government, and the current arrangements for local elections in Wales. We then look at the wider context of local elections, making recommendations designed to address some of the issues relating to lack of knowledge about, and lack of interest in, local government and local democracy which particularly struck us in our journeys around Wales. This leads to a discussion of how to make voting easier for local people, and how to persuade more people to offer themselves for election. Finally, we address the issue of possible reform of the electoral system. Unless indicated otherwise in the text, our recommendations are unanimous.

Chapter 2: Local Government and Local Elections Now

A Changing Local Government in Wales

2.1 In the Introduction we declared our commitment to a strong and effective tier of local government in Wales. But what is local government for, and why is it important? We cannot improve on the description set out in the McIntosh Commission Report.¹

"We see two essential features of local government –

- **Local government serves the people.** Public service provision has always been a prime function of local government. Local authorities are by no means the only providers of services to the public; and in some of the major statutory services they are, in effect, the agents of central government, but it remains the case that no other service provider supplies so wide a range of services.
- **Local government represents the community.** Councils are elected. They represent the people of their areas; and thus they, like Parliament, have a democratic legitimacy. Whatever service delivery functions they have – and even if they had none at all – they would still have this representational function."

2.2 This description seems to us to bring out local government's key role in improving the quality of life of local people through provision of high quality services, as well as emphasising its fundamentally democratic and representative character. Local councillors have many roles to perform, but it seems to us that these too can be badged under the two key features we have identified; councillors contribute to the organisation of services improving the quality of life of local communities, and they represent local people and local views, exerting influence on behalf of local residents. We are clear that these are vital tasks, that the role of councillors is enormously important to the health and well-being of our local communities, and that we continue to need able and dedicated people to offer themselves for this form of public service. The recommendations set out later in this Report are designed to strengthen the place of local government and local authorities in Wales.

2.3 We undertook our task at a time of considerable change in Welsh local government. The "modernisation agenda" for local government promoted by the Welsh Assembly Government will lead to fundamental changes in the way local authorities conduct their business and discharge their functions. From May 2002, the vast majority of the 22 Welsh county and county borough councils will operate "leader and cabinet" arrangements for the discharge of their functions,

1. Report of the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament (June 1999), p.10

while the remainder will establish politically balanced Council Boards for decision-making purposes. Although these two types of arrangement differ significantly, they have this in common, that decision-making powers are placed in fewer councillors' hands than was envisaged under the traditional committee system. Those councillors who are not members of cabinets or Council Boards will now be expected to undertake scrutiny roles as members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with perhaps even greater emphasis being placed on their representative responsibilities.

2.4 The new structures need to be set alongside the other main features of the Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000 which give new powers and duties to local authorities and councillors. These are:

- The duty of "Best Value" (or continuous improvement) introduced by the Local Government Act 1999;
- The power to do anything to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area, introduced by Part I of the Local Government Act 2000;
- The duty to prepare, with others, a strategy for promoting economic, social and environmental well-being (a community strategy);
- The duty under Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 to establish standards committees and adopt a code of conduct based on a model issued by the Assembly. All councillors and co-opted members will have to sign up to this code. The Local Commissioner for Administration will have the power to investigate allegations of breaches of the code. Standards committees and an independent tribunal will have powers to impose penalties on those found to have breached the code.

2.5 The Assembly Government has issued guidance and regulations on these elements. Overview and scrutiny committees can be given responsibility for conducting Best Value reviews and should be actively involved in monitoring progress on Best Value. They can also have a part to play in evaluating progress on community strategies, to see how well they have addressed particular interests and how well different policies are being drawn together. Many community strategies are being developed using area committees or area forums (the latter including a wider spread of individuals and organisations). Individual councillors also have a role to play in ensuring that constituents and community organisations in their electoral areas are involved in debating the priorities and objectives of the community strategy and in helping to communicate to them what the council and its partners are seeking to achieve.

2.6 We can sum up this section by reaffirming the enormous importance we attach to local government in Wales, and to the role of individual members; acknowledging the great changes and new ambitions already to be seen in our

local authorities as a result of the modernising agenda; and reminding ourselves that the recommendations we make on the matters within our remit must take account of this new context and, so far as possible, contribute to achieving those ambitions.

B The Structure of Local Elections in Wales

The current system

2.7 The Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 created 22 county and county borough "unitary" authorities, the members of which were first elected in 1995. The Act provides for whole-council elections to take place every four years, and so the next elections were held, in parallel with the first National Assembly elections, in May 1999. The Assembly has deferred the next local government elections until 2004; they will then be held at four-year intervals (2008, 2012, etc) while Assembly elections will be in 2003, 2007 etc. We comment later in this report about the merits of that decision.

2.8 A total of 1,270 councillors were elected to the 22 unitary councils at the 1999 elections using the First Past The Post electoral system (FPTP), also known as the Simple Majority System. This system has been used for both local government and Parliamentary elections throughout Great Britain for very many years. Under FPTP the emphasis is upon a direct link and clear accountability between voters and their elected member. Each member represents a geographically defined electoral area (termed an "electoral division" for local government elections in Welsh unitary authorities) and seeks to represent the interests of all residents and sectors within the division, regardless of differing political persuasions.

2.9 In Parliamentary elections conducted under FPTP, each electoral area ("constituency") is represented by one member only, and voters have one vote only to cast for their preferred candidate. Under current arrangements in Welsh local government, however, fewer than half of all unitary authority councillors are elected from single member electoral divisions. In the 1999 elections, 595 councillors out of a total of 1,270 (i.e. 47%) across Wales as a whole were elected from single member electoral divisions. The rest (675 councillors or 53%) were elected from 275 multi-member divisions which returned two, three, four or five members to their respective councils.

2.10 In multi-member electoral divisions voters have as many votes as there are representatives. Thus if an electoral division has three members, voters in that division are entitled to three votes – for different candidates - and voters may choose to cast all or just some of their three votes. The voting rules do not allow voters to indicate an order of preference between candidates in such a situation – each candidate voted for is identified by an "X" on the ballot paper, and each "X" is of equal value with all others cast in the ballot.

2.11 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (LGBC(W)) has now completed the review of the electoral arrangements in the 22 counties and county boroughs required by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. The Act established a presumption in favour of single member electoral divisions, but this could be displaced, either in respect of individual authorities or of parts of individual authorities, by Secretary of State direction. Directions were duly issued authorising the LGBC(W) to "consider the desirability of providing for multi-member electoral divisions" in several specified authorities and areas², and in a considerable number of instances multi-member divisions were recommended. New arrangements arising from the LGBC(W)'s recommendations were in place for most authorities by the elections of 1999. Recommendations for the remaining six await implementation by the National Assembly for Wales.

2.12 Table A summarises and compares the distribution of seats between single and multi-member seats in the 22 councils across Wales as it was in 1999 and as it would be in 2004 if the proposals awaiting confirmation were fully implemented. If all the proposals are implemented, 621 councillors (49% of the total) will be elected from single member divisions, and 643 (51%) from 261 multi-member divisions.

Table A – Distribution of seats: single member and multi-member (Wales as a whole)

	Electoral Divisions by number of seats					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
No. of electoral divisions 1999 (2004)	595 (621)	175 (164)	78 (75)	19 (20)	3 (2)	870 (882)
No. of councillors by category 1999 (2004)	595 (621)	350 (328)	234 (225)	76 (80)	15 (10)	1,270 (1,264)
%age of councillors by category 1999 (2004)	47 (49)	28 (26)	18 (18)	6 (6)	1 (1)	

n.b. the figures for 2004 take account of a modification to the Commission's proposals for Torfaen made by the Assembly Minister for Local Government. These are subject to the approval of the Assembly.

Appendix 5 shows the distribution of single and multi-member divisions in each local authority as they would be in 2004 if the outstanding proposals were implemented.

2.13 On this basis, it is clear that in large (but not all) parts of Wales, FPTP does not currently apply in its pure or classic (Parliamentary) form. On the one hand, all members of Pembrokeshire, Powys and Ynys Môn authorities are elected from single member divisions. As against that, all members of Blaenau Gwent and

2. See further Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales, "Review of Electoral Arrangements For Welsh Principal Areas: A Guidance Note" (January 1997)

Merthyr Tydfil councils are elected by FPTP from multi-member divisions and the vast majority of members in Cardiff, Newport, Vale of Glamorgan and Caerphilly are elected from such divisions.

Outcomes

2.14 The translation of votes into seats under the FPTP voting system is straightforward. The determining factors are a candidate's position in the final tally of votes and the number of representatives that the electoral area can elect to the council for which the election is held. Thus, in an electoral division with one member, the candidate who gets the most votes in the ballot wins the seat; in an electoral division with three seats, the three candidates with the most votes all win seats. The percentage of votes won by a candidate in the ballot has no direct bearing on the allocation of the seat or seats for that division.

2.15 Under FPTP, it is very much a matter of chance whether the overall result of an election throughout an authority reflects the balance of votes cast for each party in the authority's area. In the elections of 1999 there were authorities, for example Carmarthenshire, Conwy and Denbighshire, where there were close approximations between parties' shares of votes won and seats obtained and no single party held a majority of seats. Elsewhere, the Labour Party obtained substantial majorities in the council chambers of eight of the 22 Welsh local authorities. The scale of the Labour victories in these authorities ranged from 60% of the seats in Flintshire to 85% in Newport and 88% in Torfaen. Those percentages contrast markedly with the size of the vote won by the Labour Party in those eight authorities. In only one of the eight authorities did Labour win more than 50% of the estimated shares of the total number of votes cast in the authority. Even there (in Torfaen), Labour's share was no more than an estimated 55% of the total votes cast. The discrepancy between votes won and seats won was even greater in Newport, where Labour won 85% of the seats having won an estimated 45% of the votes.

2.16 This tendency of FPTP sometimes to produce highly disproportional results appears to be a particular feature of authorities where multi-member electoral divisions are extensively used. In multi-member divisions where party voting is strong and also disciplined, the largest party in the division often gains a considerable advantage. If there are three seats to be filled, it is possible, if the party vote is consistent, for all three successful candidates to be from the same party – even though that party may have achieved only a small plurality. So, in the 1999 elections in Swansea, in two four-member electoral divisions (Uplands and Castle), four Labour members won all four seats in each division despite the Labour Party having won only an estimated 22% of the total vote in Uplands and an estimated 32% in Castle.

2.17 The political outcomes of the 1995 and 1999 local elections in Wales can be illustrated by envisaging a spectrum, with single-party dominated authorities at one end and Independent-dominated authorities at the other; points between

these extremes are where the dominant party's political control is challenged or defeated by another party ("party contested") or where the intervention of Independents either prevents or threatens to prevent any one party gaining control ("mixed party/Independent"). Tables B and C illustrate this for 1995 and 1999 respectively:

Table B

1995			
Single party Dominant	Party Contested	Mixed Part/Independent	Independent- dominated
Blaenau Gwent	Monmouthshire	Carmarthenshire	Ceredigion
Bridgend		Conwy	Pembrokeshire
Caerphilly		Denbighshire	Powys
Cardiff		Gwynedd	Ynys Môn
Flintshire			
Merthyr Tydfil			
Neath Port Talbot			
Newport			
Rhondda Cynon Taff			
Swansea			
Torfaen			
Vale of Glamorgan			
Wrexham			

Table C

1999			
Single party Dominant	Party Contested	Mixed Part/Independent	Independent- dominated
Blaenau Gwent	Caerphilly	Carmarthenshire	Ceredigion
Bridgend	Monmouthshire	Conwy	Powys
Cardiff	Rhondda Cynon Taff	Denbighshire	Pembrokeshire
Flintshire	Vale of Glamorgan	Gwynedd	Ynys Môn
Neath Port Talbot		Merthyr Tydfil	
Newport		Wrexham	
Swansea			
Torfaen			

2.18 Comparison of the two sets of results shows that whereas in 1995 there was single party (Labour) dominance in 13 authorities out of 22, in 1999 three authorities (Caerphilly, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan) moved into the "party-contested" category and two more, Merthyr Tydfil and Wrexham, into the "mixed party/Independent" category. On the other hand, none of the Independent-dominated authorities showed any significant signs of increased politicisation, and Independents continued to play a significant part in the authorities in the "mixed" category.

Who gets elected?

2.19 Regardless of political affiliation, the typical county and county borough councillor in Wales is white, male, older than the average of the population and retired. The 2001 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England and Wales undertaken by the Employers' Organisation for local government and the Improvement and Development Agency (see Appendix 6) shows that 81% of all county and county borough councillors in Wales are male, the average age of Welsh councillors is 59, 99% are white and 48% are retired.

2.20 The detailed census figures reveal further interesting insights into the make-up of our council chambers. Only 19% of Welsh councillors are female, the lowest percentage among principal authority councillors in Great Britain (and unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, that proportion is not rising). In contrast, in the National Assembly, more than 40% of the members are women. Only 21 out of the all-Wales total of 1,270 councillors (1.8%) were aged under 35 years at the time of the census and only 138 (11.4%) were under 45. At the other end of the spectrum, 434 councillors (36.6%) were aged 65 years or over.

2.21 All but 13 of the 1,270 councillors described themselves as "white"; of the 13 non-white councillors 11 described themselves as "mixed race" and two described themselves as "Asian/Asian British". In terms of employment status 245 councillors (19.5%) were in full-time paid employment at the time of the census, with a further 83 (6.6%) being in part-time paid employment and 200 (16%) being self-employed.

Participation

2.22 A healthy local democracy requires high levels of participation, both by voters and candidates. We looked at both these issues in the context of the current electoral system.

Uncontested seats

2.23 Wales has a high level of uncontested seats in county and county borough council elections. In 1999, 211 out of 1,270 councillors were "returned unopposed", that is without anyone having been nominated to stand against them. The situation in the previous elections in 1995 was little better; on that occasion 208 (or 16.4%) of Welsh councillors were returned without an election being necessary in their divisions. This compares starkly with Scotland, which has a similar local government structure to Wales, where fewer than 5% of councillors were returned unopposed in both 1995 and 1999 (4.7% and 4.6% respectively).

2.24 Table D shows the distribution by local authority of uncontested seats in 1999, and the proportion of electors in each authority deprived thereby of the opportunity to vote for their local representatives:

TABLE D
Uncontested Seats in 1999 - Distribution by Authority

Authority	No. of Members	No. of Members elected without contest	% of Electorates in uncontested electoral divisions
Blaenau Gwent	42	0	0
Bridgend	54	12	20.9
Caerphilly	73	2	3.2
Cardiff	75	0	0
Camarthenshire	74	18	24.1
Ceredigion	44	14	34.1
Conwy	59	8	12.3
Denbighshire	47	2	4.3
Flintshire	70	14	20.0
Gwynedd	83	42	49.9
Merthyr Tydfil	33	0	0
Monmouthshire	42	2	4.7
Neath Port Talbot	64	9	11.5
Newport	47	0	0
Pembrokeshire	60	16	28.0
Powys	73	38	51.0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	75	1	0.8
Swansea	72	3	3.9
Torfaen	44	8	17.0
Vale of Glamorgan	47	0	0
Wrexham	52	15	27.9
Ynys Môn	40	7	15.3
WALES	1270	211	13.7

2.25 Uncontested seats are most commonly found in the predominantly rural areas of Powys and Gwynedd – in each case, around 50% of electors were unable to make use of their right to vote for their local members. In another six authorities, between a fifth and a third of the electorate similarly were unable to vote. Of the 211 members returned unopposed, Labour candidates won 80 seats (37.9%), Independents 74 (35.1%), Plaid Cymru 38 (18%), Liberal Democrats 14 (6.6%) and the Conservatives 5 (2.4%).

Turnout

2.26 Turnout in elections, at all levels, has become a matter of concern. With the assistance of local authorities' elections officers, and drawing on authorities' ballot paper accounts, we undertook a new analysis of turnout at the 1999 local elections in Wales³. We found that the turnout in 1999 in contested electoral

3. For further discussion, see Appendix 7.

divisions across Wales averaged 47%, but once account is taken of the number of uncontested seats, the proportion of the electorate casting a vote at those elections was around 41%.

2.27 Levels of turnout varied significantly between authorities. In Newport, where all divisions were contested, turnout across the authority was 39.4%; in Wrexham it was 40.9% in contested divisions and in Torfaen 41.4% (again in contested divisions only). Voters in Gwynedd (62.7%) showed far greater interest where divisions were contested and so they had the opportunity to vote, but because that was true for only around half of the seats, the proportion of the electorate in Gwynedd actually casting a vote in 1999 was 32.1%. Even so, that was a higher proportion than was achieved in either Powys (25.8%, again with only half the total of seats contested) or Wrexham (29.5%).

2.28 These turnout figures seem to us to raise several issues, and not least questions about the democratic credibility and representativeness of councils elected by fewer than a third of the electorate in their areas. Local authority representatives and the Welsh Local Government Association itself told us that they viewed with concern the numbers both of members returned unopposed and of turnout. Some councillors said that they considered their positions to have greater legitimacy, and that they could exercise greater influence, if they had been elected (as distinct from returned unopposed) and on a high turnout.

2.29 We make recommendations later in this report designed to encourage more contested elections and higher levels of turnout. In the meantime we need reliable and consistent data on turnout as the best measure of the health of our local democracy.

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government, in consultation with local government, puts in place procedures to permit the collection, on a systematic basis throughout Wales, of statistics on turnout at local government elections, based on ballot paper account data. These procedures should be in place in time for the next round of elections in 2004.

Chapter 3: Public Attitudes

3.1 We now give a brief account of the views which we heard in our meetings with the public across Wales. As has already been noted, these meetings were generally not well attended, and we do not claim that the views we heard were representative of those of the wider community in any scientific sense. Nevertheless, there were some consistent messages, and we think it right that these should be noted.

Politics and Local Action - Apathy or Antipathy?

3.2 Many of the "ordinary members of the public" (as distinct from the councillors who also came to some of our public meetings) expressed a strong dislike of party politics in local government. Some people expressed the view that party political elected members would necessarily put their party interests and loyalties ahead of those of their constituents, whereas the essence of local government should be local representation regardless of political affiliation; indeed, for some people expressing such views, party labels were distinctly secondary in importance to the commitment and character of the individuals offering themselves for election.⁴

3.3 Added to this antipathy to party politics in local government was apathy about voting. On very many occasions, the response to the question "Why don't people vote?" was "Why bother, it doesn't make any difference". This argument tended to be elaborated in one or other of three different ways:

- Local government has lost so many powers to central government and its agencies that it really does not matter who is elected as a councillor. This proposition was sometimes put in the form that local authorities are now simply agents of central government or of the National Assembly, with minimal scope for local initiative. A number of councillors expressed the same concern (while not of course endorsing the conclusion that it did not matter who was elected);
- Voting serves no purpose because the parties and politicians are "all the same", and so again it could make no difference to local people who was elected. Proponents of this view tended also to dislike the intervention, as they saw it, of party politics into local government;
- There is no point in voting because it is impossible to influence the outcome – the system operates in such a way as to dissuade supporters of minority parties from bothering to register their votes, as most seats or electoral divisions are "safe" for one party or another and the outcomes can be easily predicted.

4. One written submission to the Commission argued that because of these feelings, party political attributions on ballot forms should be removed in local government elections, but we do not think that denying local voters such relevant information would be an appropriate response to their dislike of party politics in local government.

3.4 We do not consider it appropriate to comment on the first and second of these propositions, as they raise questions which lie well outside our Terms of Reference. The third proposition is, however, highly relevant to our work, and we return to this issue later in this Report in our discussion of possible reforms of the electoral system.

3.5 This generally depressing picture was not however the whole story. We were told that, although the pressures of modern life and different work patterns had taken their toll, there were still many people committed to local activities in their communities. Whereas in the past these might have taken the form of political activity, now they were more likely to be in support of particular campaigns, for example relating to the environment. Local people would also willingly involve themselves in campaigns on particular issues as they arose – local planning issues or environmental concerns were cited to us as the sorts of issue in which significant local interest could be generated if people felt that the issue was directly relevant to them.

3.6 The lessons we can draw from such expressions of opinion are necessarily limited, given that those people offering their views cannot always be treated as representative of their communities. Nevertheless, they fit well with the most recent British Social Attitudes survey, which shows a continuing decline in trust in politicians and fewer people than previously identifying with particular political parties⁵. It would clearly be unwise, when we turn to consider possible changes to the electoral system, to ignore the levels of distrust of party politics in local government; but on the other hand we need to bear in mind the continuing willingness of people to involve themselves in community activity, even if that does not in many cases currently take the form of involvement with local government.

Knowledge and Understanding of Local Government

3.7 A second theme emerging from our public meetings was that many people confessed to a lack of understanding of what local government's role is in the way Wales is governed now. They said that there was no general understanding of the respective roles of unitary authorities, the National Assembly/Welsh Assembly Government, the United Kingdom Government, the United Kingdom Parliament and the various European institutions. Furthermore, the processes of local government and its ways of doing business were a mystery to many of the people who talked to us. We are clear that a reduction in the quantity and quality of local press coverage of local government affairs is an important factor here; indeed, we might say that the local press is failing in its duty to local people in this respect.

5. British Social Attitudes: Public policy, Social ties The 18th report: 2001-02 Edition, National Centre for Social Research, (June 2001)

3.8 This lack of understanding was particularly prevalent among young people. As users of education, leisure and public transport services, in particular, young peoples' quality of life is heavily influenced by local authority services, but a recent survey in England⁶ has shown that most young people have little idea which institution of government is responsible for providing those services or how they, as consumers, might influence service provision policy.

3.9 This conclusion seems equally applicable to Wales, and was certainly borne out in the views of the young people we met. In the course of our consultations we met representatives of several local youth councils or youth forums, both to gain their views on the issues we were addressing and also to find out the extent to which they knew about local government in their areas. The young people were all agreed on the need for local authorities to make greater efforts to inform them about, and involve them in, decision-making processes in their areas.

Conclusion

3.10 The public meetings we held provided us with a useful range of views on the problems facing our local democracy, and gave us some pointers towards possible recommendations (and also what it would not be sensible to recommend). We now turn to those issues.

6. Young people, power and influence: a poll for Charter88 and YMCA England, Charter88 (October 2001)

Chapter 4: Improving Turnout

Introduction

4.1 In this chapter we make recommendations designed to address the decline of interest in voting for local authorities. At the outset, we recognise that policy initiatives of the type we propose cannot in themselves reverse the decline in local democracy represented by falling turnout – that can only happen when voters believe both that the issues in local government elections are relevant to them, and that their votes are likely to be important in influencing possible outcomes. Nevertheless, there are steps which we believe can usefully be taken, first to encourage greater understanding of, and interest in, local democracy, and secondly to encourage more people to exercise their right to vote.

Towards a Better Understanding of Local Government

4.2 It is not realistic to expect people to take an interest in local democracy if they have no proper understanding of what councils do. The impression we gained from our visits to local authority areas was that many people are unaware of the importance local government has to their daily lives. There is also confusion about the different tiers of government in Wales, and which authorities are responsible for which services. At a practical level, to whom does the individual citizen with a problem turn – the local councillor(s), constituency or regional Assembly Members, his or her MP, or even MEP?

4.3 Section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 provides powers for the Electoral Commission to carry out or support programmes of education or information with a view to encouraging voters' participation in the democratic process. That Commission's Corporate Plan for 2002-03 to 2006-07 sets out as one of its Key Aims "To encourage greater participation in and increased understanding of the democratic process", and describes a Public Awareness Strategy designed to achieve that Aim.

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government ask the Electoral Commission, in pursuit of its Public Awareness Strategy, to undertake an information campaign in Wales. The campaign should seek both to explain which tier of authority is responsible for which public services in Wales, and to provide information about what local government does and how it works. The campaign should be organised in time to inform voters before the next local government elections in 2004.

4.4 We earlier noted that young people, in particular, seem to have little understanding of local government and local democracy. On the other hand, we agree with the comment in the recent European Commission White Paper on Youth:

"The young people who were consulted see themselves as responsible citizens. They want to be more involved in community life. They want their views to be heard in a wide variety of subjects. This will to participate must be given some room for expression at various levels, from local to international..."⁷

We were therefore glad to learn about initiatives which are currently being taken to encourage the establishment of youth forums in each local authority area, and the steps being taken by authorities to engage with these forums and include them in the decision making process on various matters. One example cited to us was that of a forum which had received representations from young people in the area about the cost of entry to the authority's leisure centres. The forum took up the case and approached the council with a variety of proposals. After discussion, consultation and testing (involving the young people working with officers and members of the council) a multi-use card was introduced for young people of the area allowing them a free visit to a leisure centre after so many paid visits. The take-up and use of the card has been very widespread and the initiative has been widely praised by users. Interaction of this kind not only encourages young people to feel part of the democratic process, but provides them with valuable opportunities to develop skills of research, analysis and negotiation. In the same way, the Assembly Government's proposal that school councils should be established in primary and secondary schools throughout Wales may offer young people practical experience of democracy operating in a familiar environment, and we welcome these plans.

4.5 We were also very interested to learn, and we strongly support, the Assembly Government's decision soon to introduce an element of "Active Citizenship" into the National Curriculum through the Personal and Social Education framework. We believe that this offers local authorities an opportunity to raise the profile of local government and enhance young people's understanding of its role. There are already examples of good practice in this respect. Both Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire County Councils, in conjunction with Careers Wales West, have taken initiatives to introduce older school students to some of the difficult issues which local authorities have to face in allocating resources among competing claims. Workshops are held, with councillors and officers in attendance, in which students take on the roles of members and officers in determining budget allocations for a forthcoming financial year. The students are made aware of the complexity of issues involved in local government and of the pressures they come under in allocating scarce resources among so many deserving cases.

We recommend each local authority in Wales to consider carefully what steps it can take, as Active Citizenship enters the National Curriculum, to raise the profile and enhance the understanding of local government by young people. Each authority will want to tailor its programme to local circumstances and different age-groups, but such action might for example

7. European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth, COM(2001), p.12

include role-play exercises of the type described above, perhaps visits to schools by local authority members and staff, as well as mock elections held in parallel with local government elections in 2004.

Local Authorities and Local People – More Two-way Communication

4.6 One of the frequent criticisms we heard throughout our consultation exercise was that councils are failing to communicate effectively with local people. Local people claimed that it was difficult to obtain information, meetings were inaccessible whether for reasons of location or timing, and methods of dealing with business were difficult for the "ordinary member of the public" to understand. If these complaints are justified, it is hardly surprising that levels of turnout at election time are low; why should voters make the effort to vote when at other times they cannot find out what their councillors are doing or why they are doing it?

4.7 The need to keep electors informed about the action being taken on their behalf is therefore essential. We know that a number of authorities are already making considerable efforts to achieve this, and the Cardiff County Council Local Democracy Unit provides an excellent example of such activity. We were glad to learn that the Assembly Government is requiring council meetings under the new executive arrangements normally to be held in public, and that any decisions taken by individual members on behalf of the authority are recorded and published, together with reasons for those decisions. These formal requirements should, however, be supplemented by a wide range of communication activity:

We recommend each authority to review its strategy for publicising its activities through local media, communication with local community groups and use of web-sites. At present, some authorities' web-sites are extremely informative about council and committee meetings, agendas and minutes, whereas others have little such information. We believe that every council's web-site should contain comprehensive material of this kind.

We recommend that each authority "go out to the people" by holding some committee meetings in publicly accessible venues throughout the authority's area in addition to, or instead of, meetings in council offices. These might be policy meetings particularly relevant to the locality, for example on planning issues. Alternatively, they could take the form of Question and Answer or "open-mike" sessions on issues of general importance; they could provide the electorate with opportunities to question cabinet members about specific policy initiatives or aspects of the Best Value or Improvement process, in addition to more detailed questions about local service provision.

4.8 Communication is not only a matter for councils as a whole, however. As locally elected and accountable representatives individual councillors must themselves take responsibility for keeping their electorates properly informed

about the conduct of council business and their own part in it. We heard a number of complaints about difficulties in making contact with local councillors, and it was also suggested that in multi-member electoral divisions, it was possible for some councillors to be less active than would have been the case if they were solely responsible for representing particular electoral divisions.

We recommend first, that the Welsh Assembly Government issue guidance requesting councillors to produce "annual reports" that summarise their own activities (rather than those of the council as a whole) on behalf of local people, and secondly, that councillors ensure wide publicity is given to the timing and location of their advice centres or surgeries, which should be held in easily accessible locations.

4.9 The recommendations we have made thus far are concerned with improving councils', and councillors', communications with their electorates. Communication is however a two-way process, and councils should be alert to messages from local people. Many of those who spoke to us expressed a growing frustration in trying to make their voices heard by local authorities. It may well be that the process of developing community strategies, with the wide-spread consultation this should entail, will go some way to meeting this concern. We do however have one suggestion to make to improve the "listening capacity" of local councils.

We recommend that councils establish formal methods for handling petitions from local people. These methods should include a provision for petitioners to address the appropriate council or committee meeting for a short period before debate on the issue begins. The authority's willingness to receive and consider petitions in this way should be widely publicised (and perhaps petition forms made easily available, either on-line or through more traditional mechanisms).

Better Information for Voters

4.10 The recommendations made so far in this chapter have been about providing local people, as local residents, with a better understanding of what local government in general does and what action their particular local authority, and councillors, are undertaking on their behalf. However, if we are to persuade local people actively to participate in local democracy through turning out to vote, we believe that additional information should be provided to people in their capacity as potential voters.

4.11 First, we return to the information needs of young people, particularly first-time voters. In her written submission to us, Julie Morgan MP referred to the nervousness some people experience at the prospect of voting; and the younger people she mentions expressed ignorance of what they were actually expected to do in polling stations. We heard the same story from the young people we

met at youth forums. If the recommendations made earlier in this chapter are accepted, the holding of mock elections in schools may help to overcome this problem. Nevertheless, we are concerned that some young people may abstain from voting on the grounds of ignorance and fear of "making fools of themselves"; and we agree with Ms Morgan that more could be done to provide young people with appropriate information, both about the voting process itself and about the electoral registration procedures which establish individuals' right to vote. We were pleased to learn that the Electoral Commission will be re-examining the registration process and running public awareness campaigns about it, and that it will be looking particularly at how members of groups which are not fully represented on the register can be encouraged or assisted to have their names included in it. To supplement this,

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government work with the Electoral Commission to produce a (bilingual) video explaining the practical aspects of voting, and arrange for it to be made widely available, particularly to young people who will shortly become eligible to vote.

4.12 Turning then to the information needs of the electorate as a whole, the prime responsibility for informing voters of candidates' names and programmes clearly falls to the candidates themselves (and their parties, if they are politically affiliated). The great difference in this respect between Parliamentary and National Assembly elections on the one hand, and local government elections on the other, is that candidates in local government elections are not entitled to the "freepost" facility, whereby each candidate is able to have a leaflet delivered to voters free of charge. We appreciate that it would constitute a significant additional burden on the public purse to extend this facility to local government elections, but we are nevertheless persuaded that a healthy local democracy requires voters at least to have the opportunity to know about the range of candidates presenting themselves and an outline of their policies if elected. The freepost facility can provide that opportunity for all candidates. Accordingly,

We recommend that the freepost facility be extended to local government elections, and that the National Assembly make appropriate provision for this in its budgets for years in which local government elections occur.

Removing Barriers to Voting

4.13 We turn now to issues about the voting process itself. If we can raise people's interest in local government, we must ensure that they are provided with proper and adequate facilities and opportunities to exercise their right to vote.

4.14 Many of our existing voting arrangements place considerable difficulties in the way of disabled people. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 specifies requirements which must be met to enable disabled people to have proper access to public services; but it is not clear how far the Act applies to the

provision of polling places, and the "Polls Apart" survey undertaken by SCOPE at the 2001 General Election reveals that many still are not accessible in the way they should be. Even where attempts have been made to address these issues the arrangements sometimes still fall short of what disabled people have a right to expect. For example, we heard of an incident where aluminium ramps, intended to provide access for those who find stairs difficult, had collapsed and thus themselves caused injury.

4.15 We therefore welcome the work already being undertaken by the National Assembly to improve the accessibility of polling stations in time for the next Assembly elections in 2003, and the intention to undertake a further evaluation. We hope that the evaluation will take place in such time as to enable any remaining problems identified to be rectified before the local government elections in 2004.

4.16 We are also aware that the House of Lords has recently considered a Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Bill which, it is proposed, will require "each local authority to prepare and implement an elections accessibility strategy...over a prescribed period, ensuring that disabled voters are able to participate fully and equally in all aspects of the registration system and electoral procedures and facilities for parliamentary, local government and European parliamentary elections". We strongly support this proposal, but we understand that, as this is a Private Member's Bill, it may not be possible for Parliamentary time to be found for it to complete its passage into law.

We recommend that if the Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Bill, or the clause relating to elections accessibility strategies in the Bill, does not become law, any legislation implementing other recommendations in this report should include an equivalent provision.

Age of Entitlement to Vote

4.17 There is then a rather different issue to consider, and that is the age at which people become eligible to vote. This subject produced some of the liveliest discussion in our public meetings.

4.18 At the age of 16, a young person can choose to leave full-time education and enter the labour market; he or she will then in due time become liable to pay income tax. Such a person may also marry without parental consent, and establish a family. These are all attributes of citizenship already recognised by law, and seem to us to raise a presumption that such people should be entitled to vote.

4.19 That argument of principle can be supported by pragmatic considerations. We have already made recommendations in this Report which are designed to improve young peoples' knowledge and understanding of local government and local democracy, building on the inclusion in the National Curriculum of Active

Citizenship. We know too from the MORI Survey of Voter Attitudes, conducted for the Electoral Commission after the 2001 General Election, that a sense of civic duty is an important factor in determining whether people choose to vote, and that there appears to be a decline in that sense of civic duty, especially among young people. We believe it is imperative to build on those educational developments and inculcate in young people an appreciation of the importance of voting as they begin to assume their responsibilities as young citizens, and we further believe that it is a mistake to allow a lengthy period of time to elapse between the school-leaving age and the age of entitlement to vote.

4.20 We acknowledge that some people will have concerns about the maturity of 16 and 17 year olds and their capacity to use their vote responsibly. We accept, too, that one effect of the extension of the franchise in this way might very well be to depress turnout percentages further, as we would not expect large numbers of young people to take immediate advantage of this new entitlement to vote. Nevertheless, we believe that the balance of argument is clearly in favour of an extension of the franchise in this way. Accordingly,

We recommend that the age of entitlement to vote in local government elections should be reduced to 16 years. We realise that a consequence of this, as the law stands, would be that such young people could also vote in elections to the National Assembly for Wales, and we would be content with such a conclusion. It must be for others to decide whether the parliamentary franchise should similarly be amended.

Making It Easier to Vote

4.21 We think that changes could usefully be made to existing voting arrangements to enable more people to vote. Polling stations for local government elections are open from 8.00am to 9.00pm, whereas for parliamentary and National Assembly elections, polling hours are 7.00am to 10.00pm. This can be a source of confusion and frustration for voters. To enable local people to have more opportunities to cast their votes at times convenient to them,

We recommend that voting hours for local government elections be extended to be consistent with those for parliamentary and National Assembly elections i.e. 7.00am to 10.00pm.

4.22 We have also noted the considerable increase in postal voting that occurred at the 2001 General Election following relaxation of the rules on entitlement to a postal vote and we welcome that, although we recognise that this development has considerable associated cost and staff resource implications for individual local authorities. Nevertheless, it is clear from the comments we received that voters continue to have difficulties in completing declaration of identity forms which must accompany postal votes. We understand that the Electoral Commission proposes to review existing procedures for absent voting.

We recommend that the Electoral Commission review, and if possible simplify, the wording on the declaration of identity form, and that a revised form be piloted amongst those, for example older people or those with sensory impairments, who might have particular need to make use of postal voting.

4.23 Both polling stations and postal voting require the use of traditional pencil and ballot paper methods, but there is now increasing interest in investigating more innovative approaches to the voting process. Technological development opens up the prospect both of electronic voting and of voting over the Internet. Electronic voting would continue to require voters to attend at polling places, but they would vote using touch screen or similar technology (with appropriate safeguards to enable corrections to be made in the event of error). Electronic voting has the potential benefit, once authority-wide electronic registers are in place, of enabling individual voters to vote anywhere within an authority's area – on entering a secure PIN number, a voter could be identified and presented with the list of candidates for that electoral division in the authority's area in which he or she is resident. The counting of votes under electronic voting arrangements should of course be both easier and quicker than traditional counting procedures.

4.24 Whereas electronic voting will still require attendance at polling stations, Internet voting would in principle allow people to vote from almost anywhere in the world. Many of the younger people we spoke to said that Internet voting, or particularly text messaging, would make them more likely to vote. It was generally agreed, however, that any new voting arrangements based on technological development should be complementary to, rather than replace, traditional arrangements; that the integrity of the ballot should be ensured before any new voting techniques were introduced; and that there should be a comprehensive information campaign to explain the new arrangements to the electorate. Public confidence in the security and integrity of new voting processes is essential. We agree with these views, but we hope that Welsh local authorities will use the 2004 poll to try out polling arrangements which make use of new technology.

We recommend Welsh local authorities to begin to consider now in light of the experience of English authorities in May 2002 and taking account of the report of the Independent Commission on Alternative Voting Methods published earlier this year, what innovative electoral arrangements based on technological development they might want to pilot in 2004; and we suggest that the Welsh Local Government Association might usefully perform a co-ordinating role so that a comprehensive range of innovative arrangements is tested across Wales at that time.

Compulsory Voting

4.25 Finally in this chapter we turn to an issue which was raised frequently with us, even though it is not mentioned in our Terms of Reference. That is the question of whether voting should be made compulsory. Many of those who attended our public meetings argued that, as citizens, people have a civic responsibility to vote, and that if there was now evidence of a decline in people's understanding of that, then voting should be made a matter of legal obligation. This argument was pressed forcibly on occasion, but few of those who advocated it had clear views on how the obligation could in practice be enforced against those local people who refused or failed to comply. Indeed, when the subject was debated, proposals for *enforcement* through sanctions of one kind or another frequently slipped into imaginative suggestions for various forms of *inducement* to people to vote (through reductions in council tax, for example).

4.26 We were not persuaded by these arguments. While we are anxious to promote a healthier local democracy through increased participation by local people at the ballot box, we must respect the right of people not to vote if that is their choice, however strongly we may disagree with it. Furthermore, even if that were not so, there is no good argument for recommending the introduction of compulsory voting for local government elections alone, which can be our only concern here. Accordingly, and despite the views of the many people who pressed the argument on us,

We recommend that no further consideration be given to making voting compulsory at local government elections in Wales.

Conclusion

4.27 The recommendations we have made in this chapter are aimed at improving people's, and particularly young people's, understanding of local government, local democracy and voting procedures, and making these procedures more accessible. However, these recommendations will be rendered far less effective if there continue to be disproportionately large numbers of uncontested elections, in which voters are given no opportunity to express their views through the ballot box. We address this issue in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Encouraging More Candidates

Introduction

5.1 We need more people in Wales to offer themselves for public service in local government. We say this for three reasons. First, as has already been noted, there is a particular problem in Wales of uncontested seats, and we have already commented on the implications of this for councils' and councillors' capacities effectively to speak on behalf of their communities. We need new candidates to come forward so that local people can have a proper choice of local representatives.

5.2 Secondly, as we have already pointed out, Welsh councillors are generally older than the average of the population, and some have served for many years, a quarter for more than 15 years⁸. In the nature of things these members would soon need to be replaced, but the Welsh Assembly Government's announcement of a severance scheme for councillors aged 60 or over who have served for more than one term and who decide not to stand for election in 2004 is likely to result in many retirements taking place, with a consequential need for new candidates to fill the gaps.

5.3 Thirdly, we need new candidates of particular types to rectify the existing imbalances in council membership⁹. The most obvious imbalance is the severe under-representation of women in our council chambers. Our attention was drawn to Principle 4 of the 1997 Universal Declaration on Democracy:

"The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their difference".

Assessed by this standard, Welsh local democracy is clearly wanting. With fewer than 20% of Welsh councillors being female, and (in contrast with other parts of the United Kingdom) no sign of that proportion increasing, we consider that Welsh local government faces a major challenge if it can plausibly claim to speak for local people in their entirety and demonstrate community leadership.

5.4 Furthermore, Wales is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-faith society. The under-representation of black and ethnic minorities in our main organs of governance, including local government, must be of great concern. Welsh local government has, through its Generic Equality Standard, itself recognised the relevance and importance of fair and equal treatment in its provision of services and its employment practices, but the Standard is not drafted in a way which enables it to apply to the recruitment of more members from under-represented groups. The All-Wales Ethnic Minority Association (AWEMA) is

8. See further Section B of Census of Local Authority Councillors 2001, Appendix 6

9. See Appendix 6

pursuing a Right to Vote campaign encouraging electoral registration by members of under-represented groups but it is clear that much more needs to be done to identify and encourage members of the minority communities to come forward and offer themselves as election candidates, whether at local, regional or national level.

5.5 Of course we agree that a good councillor will try to represent effectively any member of the local electorate, regardless of that councillor's gender, ethnic origins or political views. However, men and women, younger and older people, people from varied ethnic backgrounds all have different life experiences and different priorities. If we want to enrich local democracy, we need as far as possible to see those differences reflected in the membership of our local authorities.

Widening Participation – Whose Responsibility?

5.6 Political parties clearly have a vital role to play in achieving this. We do not underestimate the difficulties they face; each of the parties which gave evidence to us outlined the problems they had in finding people willing to offer themselves as candidates (and we have also heard anecdotes about people who had allowed their names to go forward as party candidates on the assurance that they had no prospect of success, and who had then, sometimes to their considerable discomfort, been elected). The Assembly Government's proposals, which we welcome, for improved councillors' allowances (including carers allowances) and for making allowances pensionable, should encourage more party members (and others) to consider council service a realistic option. We have no specific recommendations to make to the political parties on candidate recruitment, other than to encourage them to continue their efforts to secure a wider range of candidates and to make use, where appropriate, of the new opportunity provided by the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 to select candidates from all-women shortlists.

5.7 Political parties are not however monopoly suppliers of candidates for local government office – and that is especially so in Wales, given the important role that Independent candidates continue to play in many Welsh local authorities. A local authority officer told us that he could see no role for councils in this matter, and that it was a matter either for the parties to put forward candidates or for individuals to take the initiative to stand. We do not agree, and we were therefore pleased to hear the Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association say recently:

"Councils must...be externally focussed in their areas and engage a vast range of organisations, partners and individuals. In doing so they are changing the rules of the game on public consultation and engagement. But they are not changing sufficiently in drawing upon all sectors of society and [are] failing to attract a new generation into elected public service."¹⁰

10. Speech by Sir Harry Jones to a seminar on Widening Participation in Local Government, Marriott Hotel, Cardiff, 4 March 2002 (emphasis in original)

This seems to us a very proper recognition of the fact that councils themselves have some responsibility for seeking out and encouraging local people to consider public service as councillors.

5.8 In saying this, we understand that existing members may initially feel some ambivalence about their councils appearing to encourage new candidates to come forward. We believe, however, that on reflection they will accept that councils, and councillors, are effectively trustees for local democracy and have a duty to promote it, that a vigorous democracy is demonstrated in a wide range of candidates offering themselves for election, and that it is no reflection at all on existing members that councils encourage more people to offer themselves for local elected office.

We recommend that each authority should work with local political parties and with community groups to promote the idea of council membership among local people. We draw attention to the innovative magistrate shadowing scheme organised for members of ethnic minority communities by Operation Black Vote, and suggest that authorities consider similar councillor shadowing schemes, particularly for members of minority communities. It would be helpful if the Welsh Local Government Association produced guidance for its member authorities on the action they can properly take to increase the size, and enhance the diversity, of the pool of potential candidates. Political parties and organisations representing community groups should consider what action can be taken locally to encourage more people to consider becoming candidates.

5.9 We believe that there should also be action at an all-Wales level. We welcome the Assembly Government's intention to publish a leaflet on "Becoming a Councillor", and we hope that it will be made widely available. We believe however that the sort of general information provided by such a publication should be supplemented by more targeted activity.

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association should build on their recent Widening Participation seminars through publicity in the ethnic minority press and similar outlets on standing for election. Such publicity could usefully refer to examples of role models drawn from currently under-represented groups to illustrate the contribution such people can play in a healthy local democracy.

Further Action to Increase the Number of Candidates

5.10 Effective marketing and information campaigns promoting council membership may encourage more people to give serious consideration to this form of public service. Nevertheless, for many people currently in full-time employment, the difficulties of reconciling career aspirations with council service may appear insoluble. On several occasions in our public meetings we were reminded of the former practice among nationalised industry employers, in

particular, of allowing generous amounts of paid time off for employees to enable them to undertake local government responsibilities. These arrangements have long since disappeared, and although there remains a vestigial legal entitlement to reasonable (unpaid) time off for public service, including council service,¹¹ it seems to be of minimal significance in practice. Fewer than half of all councillors in Wales are now in employment, whether full-time, part-time or self-employed.¹²

5.11 We note that the Welsh Assembly Government has declared its intention to "explore through the partnership councils (local government, voluntary sector and business) how to support employers in releasing employees who wish to represent their communities."¹³ We make the following recommendations on this matter, which the Assembly Government might want to consider with its partners:

We recommend that public sector organisations review their existing special leave arrangements for staff wishing to undertake council service. We note that up to 18 days paid leave per annum is normally available, but this can only go some way to covering the 90 hours per month which councillors on average spend on council service. We also recommend that public sector employers, as they increasingly move towards "competency frameworks" in assessing staff for promotion, take full and proper account of the skills and abilities which their employees who are councillors have to demonstrate as members of local authorities.

We recommend that private sector employers be encouraged to publish their policies for allowing their employees time off for public service (including elected public service), and we recommend the Welsh Assembly Government, and other public sector organisations, to take account of those statements in their procurement practices.

We recommend the Welsh Assembly Government to consider, in consultation with its partners, whether it would be practicable to introduce a compensation scheme for private and voluntary sector employers to permit them to allow their employees time off for council service. Compensation for self-employed people for time given for council service should also be considered in any such arrangements.

We recommend the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association jointly to establish and run an annual award scheme which recognises private and voluntary employers who are most supportive of employees wishing to serve as councillors.

5.12 Finally on this issue of employed people serving as councillors, we understand that a question has arisen as to whether allowing employees time off for local government service might amount to a political party donation under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and so be registrable.

11. Employment Rights Act 1996, ss.50-51

12. Appendix 6, sections A6-A9

13. Freedom and Responsibility in Local Government, para. 5.12

Since the legal position has not been subject to judicial consideration and remains obscure, we make no specific recommendation here, but clearly it would be beneficial if the conclusion reached was that allowing employees such time off was not to be regarded as a registrable political donation, and it should be public policy to achieve that result.

5.13 We have one other recommendation to make to achieve an increase in the number of candidates. Our report is almost entirely concerned with electoral arrangements for county and county borough councils, but we were glad in our public meetings to hear from several community councillors. We believe that community councils, particularly perhaps the ones serving the larger communities, can provide a very useful training ground in local government and encourage community councillors to consider standing for county/county borough councils. Data we have seen¹⁴ show however that in around one-third of cases there are fewer candidates for community council seats than there are seats available. Many of these vacancies have to be filled by co-option, and there is a danger that co-opted members will be drawn from a narrowly-defined group, existing members' local acquaintances for example. If vacancies available for filling by co-option were more widely advertised, individuals from a wider cross-section of the community might offer themselves to serve (and, in due time in light of their experience, consider standing for county/county borough seats).

We recommend the Welsh Assembly Government, after consultation with the Associations representing town and community councils in Wales, to issue guidance to community councils that vacancies to be filled by co-option should be widely advertised in their areas, with particular attention paid to informing local community groups and young peoples' organisations about these vacancies.¹⁵

Training and Support for Members

5.14 Although we have expressed concern that there is currently an over-reliance by Welsh councils on long-serving members as councillors, we should not be understood to say that such people have no future part to play in our local authorities. On the contrary, a solid block of experienced and knowledgeable councillors, in combination with a new generation of elected members, will be of enormous value to local democracy. It is important, therefore, that they are provided with the training and support they need to persuade them to continue to offer themselves for elected public service. Welsh councils will in future operate, as a result of the modernising agenda, in a radically different way, and we are therefore pleased to note the Assembly Government's statement of intent to work with the Welsh Local Government Association to ensure that adequate training and officer support will be provided to enable councillors to perform the scrutiny role effectively.

14. Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales, M Woods, W J Edwards, J Anderson, E Fahmy & G Gardner, University of Wales, Aberystwyth

15. See also paragraph 5.16, third recommendation, below

5.15 However, if the efforts to secure a new generation of elected members are successful, it will be equally important for these new members to receive appropriate induction training. In some authorities, member turnover has not been a major feature, and it is possible that induction training has not been given the importance it should have. Yet if new members are not integrated quickly and effectively into their responsibilities, there is a danger that they will not wish to stand again, and the benefits of identifying a new cadre of councillors will have been lost. Accordingly,

We recommend that councils review their existing training and induction programmes for new councillors and bring them fully up to date with the modernising agenda. We hope that examples of best practice in this respect can be widely shared among authorities. Informal mentoring schemes for new members may have a part to play in this.

Technical Changes

5.16 Finally, we make some suggestions for technical/administrative changes which may assist in encouraging more people to stand for elected public office.

We recommend that the requirement for the number of signatures in support of nominations of candidates for local government elections be brought into line with that for National Assembly elections i.e. that each candidate's nomination should have to be supported by the signatures of two electors rather than ten, as at present.

We recommend that nomination forms for candidates should be available online, and that they should also be easily obtainable and returnable by post rather than in person as some authorities require.

We also recommend that the minimum age for candidates is reduced from 21 to 18 (but not to 16, which is the age we have recommended should entitle individuals to vote). We do this, not in the expectation that many 18 year old candidates will suddenly emerge, but rather because it will enable community councils to co-opt those aged 18 and over to fill vacancies, and so perhaps persuade such young people in due time to move forward to stand for county/county borough councils.

Conclusion

5.17 In Chapter 2 of this Report, we said that the role of councillors is enormously important to the health and well-being of our local communities, and that we continue to need able and dedicated people to offer themselves for this form of public service. The recommendations in this chapter are aimed at

securing the new generation of councillors which Wales will need as those who have served so effectively over so many years now step aside. In many respects, the suggestions we have made reflect the assumptions underlying the Wales Charter for Councillors which was launched by the Welsh Local Government Association in September 2000. The Charter is reproduced as Appendix 8 to this Report. It is a statement by and for Welsh local government, but it has implications not only for local authorities and those who work for them, but for the business community, political parties and other public sector organisations in Wales. We believe that the principles set out in the Charter ought to command general agreement. Accordingly,

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government endorse the Wales Charter for Councillors as a statement of aspiration, and discuss with its partners in the partnership councils what steps can now be taken by interested parties to ensure that the Charter's provisions are given full effect.

Chapter 6: The Electoral System

Introduction

6.1 We finally consider what reforms, if any, we should recommend for the electoral system. In the earlier parts of this Report, our recommendations have all been unanimous (and in the view of all of us apply regardless of whatever electoral system might in future be adopted for Welsh local government). In this chapter, while we are unanimous on most issues, some recommendations come forward from seven Commissioners out of nine. Eleri Ebenezer and Alun Williams take a different view on these; their conclusions are set out at the end of this Chapter.

The Context of Our Inquiry

6.2 We had in mind a number of considerations in reaching our conclusions on the most appropriate electoral system for Welsh local government.

- (i) *Political Management Structures*:- Our Terms of Reference required us specifically to "have regard for the developments in political management which follow from the Local Government Act 2000; forms of management which are required to be efficient, transparent and accountable with clear delegations of responsibility for decision making and with effective arrangements for scrutiny and accountability". We have already noted that Welsh local government is facing a revolution in its political management structures, as part of the Welsh Assembly Government's "modernisation agenda" for local government. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, whatever precise form these new structures take in individual authorities, they are all designed to place in fewer councillors' hands than hitherto the power to make decisions on behalf of these authorities; and the corollary of this is that some councillors now will have a more formal overview and scrutiny role. The inference the majority of us drew from this is that the creation of a stronger executive element within an authority also requires the creation of a strong scrutiny capacity in that council's membership. Any electoral system we recommend therefore has to be one capable of providing such an effective check or balance. (We were concerned to hear in some authorities that scrutiny committees would normally be chaired by members of the majority party in those authorities).
- (ii) *Turnout and Contested Seats*:- Given our anxieties about the health of local democracy in Wales, it was clearly important for us, at the very least, not to recommend an electoral system which might be likely either to reduce turnout further or reduce the number of contested seats. Some of the arguments we heard contrasted levels of turnout under First Past the Post (General Elections) with those held under different forms of Proportional

Representation (PR) such as National Assembly elections and elections to the European Parliament; the lower turnout in these PR elections, it was argued, showed the potential danger to a healthy democracy of introducing a PR system for local government. The majority of us think that that argument is based on a false comparison. Turnout in elections for "second-order" authorities in our view is always likely to be lower than for the leading democratic entities in the state such as the UK Parliament; and that is so regardless of the form of electoral system used. If proponents of the "PR means lower turnout" argument had been able to point to a case where a particular elected body had experienced a decline in turnout after moving from First Past the Post to a PR system, that might have been very persuasive. However, they did not – and so at this stage we simply say that the effect of PR on turnout/contestation is an issue to which we need to return.

- (iii) *Local Representation*:- We noted in Chapter 3 the considerable importance which local people attach to having their areas represented by councillors particularly identified with those areas; indeed, for many, effective local representation was more important than the political label adopted by the local members. Our Terms of Reference also drew attention to this point as we were required to have in mind "the capacity of each elected member to represent his or her electors in ways that reflect the expectations of electors". The tradition of territorial representation, of the identification of elected members with particular geographic areas and the people who live in them, is very strong. Any conclusions we reached on future electoral systems for local government in Wales clearly needed to have full regard to that consideration.
- (iv) *Diversity*:- Our Terms of Reference reminded us of the need to "have regard for the diversity of geographical circumstances of councils in Wales: diversity in the size and dispersion of populations served, the relationship between electoral areas and natural communities". Our understanding of this was that we should be careful not to seek to force the local government electoral system into a rigid strait jacket (although we fully understood the need for a very high degree of consistency across Wales in local voting arrangements). The Terms of Reference also directed our attention to the "capacity of the whole council to reflect the diversity of interests and values in the local community". This we took to refer to the need for a council's members so far as possible to reflect the local community, not only in terms of its own composition (with appropriate proportions of men and women, younger and older people, people of different ethnic backgrounds, and so forth) but also in terms of the prevailing political and social views of the local inhabitants, taken in the round. We bore in mind also that, as a body appointed by the Welsh Assembly Government which is a part of the National Assembly, we should seek, as the Assembly must under s.120 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, to ensure equality of opportunity for all people, and that our recommendations on future electoral systems should take full account of that principle.

- (v) *Anti-Politics*:- Finally, we were reminded by our Terms of Reference of the tradition in some parts of Wales of having elected members who are independent of political parties, and by implication that we should respect that tradition. That theme was strongly reinforced by the public comments which we have noted in Chapter 3, showing some dislike of party politics in local government. Clearly, any recommendations on the electoral system needed to allow local people to continue to be able to elect non-party candidates to local authorities if they wished to do so.

Objectives of the Electoral System

6.3 Having these various considerations in mind, we then considered (as required by our Terms of Reference) what the objectives of the electoral system for local government in Wales should be. Identification of these would enable us to test the arguments advanced in support of particular electoral systems. In this context we noted a recent Report by the House of Lords Constitution Committee¹⁶, which distinguishes between different concepts of representation. The traditional concept of representation, sometimes called the "principal-agent" version, requires simply that members are elected to speak on behalf of a particular body or group of people. A member "represents" all members of that body or group, regardless of whether individual members of the group voted for that member, and also regardless of whether the elected member shares the characteristics of members of the group. That, in very short summary, is the theory of representation behind current electoral arrangements for the House of Commons.

6.4 There is however another concept of representation, which the majority of us considered more appropriate to local government now. This stresses the need for the elected body itself to be (broadly) representative of the community it serves; it should so far as possible be a microcosm of that community, and the electoral system should be such as to enable the elected body to take that form. We referred in Chapter 5 to the need for local authorities to exhibit greater diversity in their membership so as to reflect the varying life experiences of the different groups of people who make up our society. The majority of us would press this argument one step further, and say that a proper local representative democracy requires a diversity of membership of local authorities consistent not only with the age, gender and ethnic composition of the communities they serve, but also with the diversity of opinion in those communities. In our view, the local electoral system must be one which allows both the diversity of people and their diversity of opinion to be properly reflected in council membership.

The Options

6.5 Our Terms of Reference asked us to consider any voting system we thought might be appropriate for local government, but also asked that we include in that consideration seven of the more widely familiar systems, namely:

16. Third Report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution: The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill (November 2001). See also D M Farrell, "Electoral Systems, A Comparative Introduction", (2001), pp. 11-12

- First Past the Post (FPTP)
- Party List Systems (PLS)
- The Additional Member System (AMS)
- Alternative Vote (AV)
- Supplementary Vote (SV)
- Single Transferable Vote (STV)
- A combination of Alternative Vote and Additional Member System [also known as the Alternative Vote Plus (AV+)]

A brief description of the main principles of each of these systems is at Appendix 9.

6.6 Our consultations sought comments on the merits and appropriateness of the identified systems but also invited suggestions for other voting systems not included in our original terms of reference. No "other" system was in fact suggested during any of our consultations nor in the evidence submitted. Nor did we come across in our research any other systems which might serve our purposes. Consequently our consideration of the most appropriate voting system for local government in Wales did not stray beyond the systems listed in our Terms of Reference. However, in light of some of the arguments put to us, we thought it appropriate to give special consideration to two particular issues:

- (i) Our consideration of FPTP examined separately the status quo (ie retention of the existing mix of single and multi-member electoral divisions) on the one hand, and a new structure of single member divisions throughout Wales on the other; and
- (ii) In addition to considering systems of STV and AV uniformly across Wales, we also considered a hybrid system which would apply a mix of STV and AV.

6.7 We soon concluded that four voting systems were not appropriate for detailed consideration. These were:

i. Party List Systems (PLS)

6.8 We heard or received no more than two or three very general statements in favour of a party list system for local government. A large number of people appeared to be familiar with the main properties of PLS although most needed reminding that this system is now used for elections to the European Parliament. PLS is recognised as a highly proportional system and its application in local government elections would give representation to parties in close relation to their levels of support among the local electorate. Some pressure groups also pointed out that party lists are useful in persuading political parties to include candidates from under-represented groups in their lists – although whether they would be placed high enough to stand a chance of election is another matter.

6.9 None of the proponents of PLS offered advice on the technicalities of how the system should be applied – for example, should the electoral area cover the whole of the local authority or should the authority be broken down into sub-divisions with lists submitted in each sub-division. Nor did the proponents cover the issue of how Independents would be able to compete on equal terms with political parties.

6.10 Most references to the party list system were negative; people claimed it was inappropriate for local government since the elected members represent large, ill-defined areas, remote from the communities with which local people identify. Some members might be able to sit back, enjoy an easy life and let others deal with constituents' business, safe in the knowledge that they were assured of a high position on their party's list and so would be re-elected regardless.

6.11 There was suspicion that PLS would favour the party machines, which would ensure that party loyalists topped the lists and would be elected at the expense of candidates who were more concerned with representing the wishes of their electors.

Our View

PLS would offer a means of ensuring that the widest range of views in a community is represented in the council chamber, but we believe that it might undermine significantly several of the key principles we were asked to uphold. PLS does not easily allow for clearly identified representation at the local level and as such lines of accountability are blurred. Voters clearly do want councillors who are identified with a local area, to whom they can go with some confidence that they will look into an issue affecting their local area. PLS is too much focused on the global outcome, whereas local government is about local people, local issues and local needs. We were also concerned that PLS would serve as a major impediment to Independent candidates and as we pointed out earlier in this chapter, we could not recommend any system which effectively takes away from non-political candidates any reasonable prospect of electoral success.

ii. Additional Member System (AMS)

6.12 AMS is probably the most widely understood system of proportional representation in Wales because of its use in the elections to the National Assembly. A few people were in favour of AMS for council elections. They felt it introduced a desired and necessary element of proportionality, but retained the directly elected local member. Some felt that having members elected from larger areas than the local division would help generate more strategic thinking in the council. Others felt that a proportional system was desirable – primarily to eliminate the tendency of FPTP to produce "one-party states" - and that the same system should be used for council elections as was used for the Assembly to minimise voter confusion about voting systems.

6.13 Some people recognised that the list members might be elected from sub-divisions of the local authority area and suggested various options – usually based on historic local government boundaries (eg in Rhondda, Cynon, Taff one sub-division could be used for each of the three former district areas). No-one commented on the ratio of members from FPTP divisions and from lists. Nor did anyone comment on how many should be elected from each FPTP division. There seemed to be a presumption that each division would have one member only - which would entail substantial re-drawing of electoral boundaries.

6.14 Those against AMS raised many of the same concerns as those opposed to straightforward party lists (see above), but another view expressed was the belief that list members were "second-class" representatives beside the directly elected members. It was also claimed that there was confusion and irritation that people who had been unsuccessful in FPTP elections might still win a seat by means of their being highly placed on their party's regional list. The National Assembly experience was said to show that AMS generated bickering between constituency and list members in an area and voters were confused as to whom they could call on for advice and support. It was also argued that many people were confused by the requirement, under the version of AMS adopted for the National Assembly, for voters to cast two votes, and it was said that they did not understand the relationship between the two.

Our View

We believe that AMS has advantages compared with PLS as a voting system for local government. The local link between voter and the council chamber is maintained by the divisional representative, the system provides an element of proportionality which serves as a check on one-party dominance, and the list component allows parties to include and give prominence to candidates from under-represented groups.

In the end, however, we felt it inappropriate to recommend AMS for local government elections. The objections to list systems we mentioned in relation to PLS apply with equal force to the Additional Member component here. Also, we could not see how a local authority could benefit from a division of members, some of whom would have constituency responsibilities and some not. Nor was it clear how AMS would apply when electoral division seats were uncontested – would voters lose their additional votes as well? For all these reasons, we concluded that we could not endorse AMS for local government in Wales.

iii. Supplementary Vote (SV)

6.15 The Supplementary Vote attracted least comment of all the systems during our consultations and in evidence submitted. References to its use in the election for the London Mayor failed to generate any interest or support. One person did suggest using the French two round system of voting. This is a variation of the

Supplementary Vote, although the process is extended over two separate voting days, with the top two candidates from the first ballot going forward to the second ballot held on a later date.

6.16 SV would require single member divisions, a new and unfamiliar voting process and, as another majoritarian system, would not necessarily produce a proportional result.

Our View

SV is a more restrictive version of the Alternative Vote (AV), in that voters are given only two choices rather than, as under AV, as many choices as there are candidates for a given electoral division. Like AV, it operates in single-member divisions. It seemed to us that if we were to decide in favour of a majoritarian system in single-member electoral areas which allows voters more than one choice, there was no logical reason to restrict voters' choice in the way that the Supplementary Vote does. The counting process might be a little longer under AV but we could see no reason to deny voters the advantage of the wider discretion AV provides.

iv. Alternative Vote Plus (AV+)

6.17 There was little interest shown in AV+ although one or two contributors did perceive it as an improvement on AMS because the FPTP members would have a broader level of support in their divisions.

6.18 In so far as there was much debate, largely the same virtues and disadvantages were put forward for AV+ as we otherwise heard for AMS and AV. The system is untried anywhere in the world.

Our View

AV+ is a refinement of AMS. The reasons we have discounted AMS as an appropriate system for local government elections in Wales apply also to AV+. An additional factor which persuades us against the system is the fact that it combines two voting processes. Voters would have to use a numerical ranking system on the electoral division ballot paper for the AV component and then switch to marking the ballot paper for the Additional Members with a single cross. This seems to us to be unnecessarily confusing for all concerned.

6.19 Having discounted these four systems, we were left with First Past the Post (in its current form or, alternatively, with single-member divisions everywhere), the Alternative Vote, and the Single Transferable Vote. We consider these below.

v. First Past The Post (FPTP) – no change

6.20 We had been asked to include in our review the voting system currently in use for local government elections. We made it clear in our consultations that

there was no requirement placed on us to recommend a different system. We therefore had discretion to recommend no change to the existing arrangements if we considered that they best served the needs of local government in Wales.

6.21 We began by looking at and inviting comments on the workings of the existing FPTP system, with its mixture of single and multi-member electoral divisions. Proponents argued that the system is tried and tested, having been used for local government elections in Wales for over a century. Voters know what is expected of them and understand how the outcomes are achieved. The boundaries of electoral divisions, whether single or multi-member, are said to be the product of extensive local consultation and reflect natural and established communities. Proponents also argued that FPTP maintains a clear link between the voter and his or her representative; and that it tends to produce strong and stable administration, unlike systems of PR. Under FPTP elected members represent all the residents of their electoral areas, so all interests are properly represented on councils under this system.

6.22 Opponents of FPTP claim that the system tends to produce outcomes which are disproportional, with the result that the make up of an elected body will only rarely reflect the preferences of voters across the authority's area.

6.23 This tendency of FPTP to disproportionality is compounded by the existence in so many areas of multi-member electoral divisions. In multi-member divisions where party voting is strong and also disciplined, the largest party in the division often gains a considerable advantage. If there are three seats to be filled, it is possible, if the party vote is consistent, for all three successful candidates to be from the same party – even though that party may have achieved only a small plurality. Further, the argument that multi-member wards recognised long-established and distinct communities was said to be specious – people in Swansea, for example, alluded to the lack of common identity of areas within several of the authority's many multi-member divisions.

vi. First Past The Post (FPTP) – single member divisions throughout

6.24 Several proponents of FPTP acknowledged the force of reservations expressed about multi-member divisions and the distorting effect they might have on the overall result in an authority. These people believed strongly that the link between the directly elected member and his or her division was the most important characteristic of local democracy – and this was best achieved through FPTP. They conceded that having so many multi-member seats undermined the clarity and accountability which they saw as the particular strength of the member-division relationship. They therefore accepted that it would be preferable if multi-member divisions were abolished and replaced with single member electoral divisions throughout Wales, with members elected by FPTP. Voters liked and understood the clarity and simplicity of FPTP and refining the system along these lines would reinforce its strengths. It would reflect the practice at county council level before reorganisation in 1995, arrangements which had worked well.

6.25 There were two groups of opponents to the argument for single member FPTP: – (a) those who were in favour of FPTP but wanted to retain the status quo in respect of multi-member arrangements. These people argued that multi-member divisions were the products of extensive local consultation and the boundaries did reflect the local sense of community identity; and (b) supporters of proportional representation who argued that a refinement of the FPTP system would not address the disproportional effects of the system. It might also undermine attempts to broaden the gender, age and ethnic profile of candidates since multi-member contests did at least allow parties some scope to include members of those under-represented groups in their nominated slates of candidates whereas selection procedures in single-member divisions operated largely to the benefit of "traditional" candidates – older white males.

The Majority's View

We fully understand the strongly expressed desire for maintaining a clear link between local representatives and their electoral divisions. Voters want readily identifiable members to whom they can turn when needing assistance on council matters. One of the strengths of FPTP is that it sustains this link in a very clear fashion, but we have concerns about other aspects. In particular, we believe that FPTP is much less likely to produce a council which reflects the diversity of interests and values in the local authority's area.

At the political level, FPTP over the years has produced too many one-sided results in our council chambers. There is a consistent pattern of single parties enjoying overwhelming majorities in council chambers in some authorities, often delivered on a minority of the votes cast in the election. We are particularly concerned about the impact of such imbalance in the post-modernisation era for local government. The new executive arrangements which came into effect in all councils in Wales from 1 May 2002 envisage a strong scrutiny role for non-executive councillors. We believe that scrutiny of the executive may be less effective if there are only a few opposition members on councils to lead or serve on scrutiny committees.

Furthermore, councillors in the modern age are charged with being community leaders. We do not believe that they can aspire credibly to that status unless the make up of the council chamber more broadly reflects the community. There are, of course, several factors which conspire against a more representative pool of councillors. Others are dealt with elsewhere, but we believe that FPTP is an important barrier to the selection of candidates from under-represented groups. The system's "winner takes all" principle helps persuade party selection committees to take safe options when choosing candidates. The evidence from proportional representation elections elsewhere suggests that the need to put forward multi-candidate tickets which appeal to as many sectors of the community as possible does serve as a very real incentive to parties to put forward more female, disabled, young and ethnic minority candidates.

We believe that our concerns about disproportional results and lack of diversity apply for both variables of FPTP which we examined. Multi-member divisions do offer some opportunity to address the diversity issue, but we do not believe this compensates for the glaring injustice of the effect they have in over-rewarding already strong parties. Single member divisions throughout Wales might pare down some of the very largest majorities, but we do not believe that they would have significant impact on the single-party dominated authorities. (Bridgend and Flintshire councils for example are already predominantly made up of single member divisions and in both Labour enjoys large majorities of seats with minority shares of the vote).

By doing away with the multi-member option we would also be making it even more difficult for people from the under-represented groups to be selected as candidates. We do not believe that FPTP in either guise would meet our requirement to recommend an electoral system which enables adequate recognition to be given to the diversity of interests, values and life experiences in local communities.

Eleri Ebenezer and Alun Williams have reached different conclusions on the merits of FPTP. These are set out in their Minority View at the end of this chapter.

vii. Alternative Vote (AV)

6.26 AV is a majoritarian system with members returned from single member divisions, but unlike FPTP it invites voters to rank candidates in order of preference on the ballot paper. Votes for the least successful candidate are redistributed among the other candidates in accordance with voters' preferences, and the process repeated until one candidate has more than half of the total number of valid votes. Proponents of AV claimed that it reinforces the direct link between the elected member and his or her voters, since to be elected each member required a very broad level of support among the voters (usually broader than a member elected under FPTP, who can be successful in a multi-candidate contest with much less than a majority of votes).

6.27 Opponents of AV claimed that as a preferential voting system its introduction would involve a change to the traditional method of marking the ballot paper. This they argued could confuse voters. Voters might also be confused and aggrieved if they ended up with a representative who had not obtained the greatest number of first preference votes. AV would require the breaking up of multi-member divisions which reflected established communities, since the system could only work with single-member divisions. Supporters of proportional representation pointed out that AV is not proportional, so the issue of "one-party states" might not be addressed, nor would it offer parties as much scope to include candidates from the under-represented groups.

Our View

AV has similar strengths and weaknesses as FPTP in its single member variant. Like FPTP, it produces a clear and strong relationship between an individual member and his or her electors, and it would permit (although perhaps might make slightly more difficult than FPTP does) the election of Independents. However, it is not a proportional system, and therefore is not well-suited either to securing the reflection in council membership of the diversity of local communities which we consider essential, or to reducing the incidence of "one-party states" (which we consider a particular concern in the context of new political management structures in local authorities).

viii. Single Transferable Vote (STV)

6.28 We heard and received evidence from proponents of STV who argued that this system provided the best balance between proportionality and maintaining the local link and accountability between elected members and their voters. It was claimed that since STV would be based on multi-member divisions this would allow parties to put forward candidates from different parts and different sectors of the electoral area; it was further argued that the influence of voters is enhanced because they have a choice of candidates both between and within parties. As a proportional system, STV would produce councils whose make-up more broadly reflected the diversity of views and interests in the area. Proponents claimed that STV does not disadvantage Independents, since they could stand on an equal basis with candidates of parties and the areas to campaign over would not be logistically overwhelming. Reference was made to STV in the Irish Republic where 10% of councillors are Independent. Supporters argued that the voting process is not complicated – voters are asked merely to rank candidates numerically in order of preference; they do not need to rank all the candidates on the ballot paper. It was pointed out that STV has been used for many years for most elections in the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, including local government elections.

6.29 We were unable to elicit strong views on how many members should be returned for each division under an STV system for local government in Wales. The received wisdom is that normally one would need at least three members in an electoral division in order to provide a reasonable degree of proportionality in the results from that division, but more members are recommended if proportionality is the priority. The Kerley Report in Scotland recommended three members for divisions in most parts of Scotland but advocated two members per division throughout the most rural counties.

6.30 Opponents of STV pointed to a need for larger multi-member divisions which they claimed would dilute the local accountability of members and their identification with an area and its problems. Divisions which were large in size

and electorate would be difficult for councillors to represent effectively, and this would particularly be the case in the more rural and sparsely populated areas. There would be less likelihood of burdens being shared if members were of different parties – rather it would give rise to competition, bickering, resting on laurels and voter confusion. The voting process might not be confusing but the process by which the elected members emerged was very confusing. People might end up with members who were primarily the second, third or fourth choices of voters – that was not democratic legitimacy. It was claimed that STV would give rise to minority administrations, which most people equated with weak and unstable government.

The Majority's View

Each of the electoral systems we have examined has its strengths and weaknesses, and none addresses completely the considerations which we set out at the beginning of this chapter. In the end, therefore, we need to identify an electoral system which can plausibly claim to address as many of the specified considerations in the most effective way possible. The majority of us have concluded that STV is the system best designed to do so for the following reasons:

First, STV is a Proportional Representation system. As such, it has far greater capacity than do majoritarian electoral systems to secure representation of the diversity of views within communities. STV as a system may not be able to secure the "pure" proportionality which can be obtained by particular versions of Party List Systems, or even perhaps as much as some versions of the Additional Member System, but it can take us some way down that road. It follows that STV has the potential to address the "single party state" problem, and facilitate the election of members who can provide the strong check and balance which we believe the introduction of new political management structures in local authority requires.

Secondly, STV has the potential to address other aspects of diversity. The system allows a degree of flexibility, in that (in contrast to single member divisions under FPTP) electoral divisions under STV can be constructed having regard to different geographical circumstances and population patterns, with the required electorate/councillor ratio achieved by varying the numbers of councillors elected from each division having regard to the number of voters in those divisions. So far as the system's capacity to take account of diverse life experiences is concerned, political parties will need to present "slates" of candidates in the multi-member constituencies which STV requires. They will come under considerable pressure to ensure that those slates offer voters a choice of candidates in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. More members of such under-represented groups are therefore likely to be selected as candidates.

Thirdly, STV offers voters a far greater opportunity than does FPTP to express preferences between candidates. As such, it substantially enhances voter choice. Fewer people nowadays identify themselves with, or exhibit continuing loyalty to, particular political parties, and STV is a system which enables voters to express preferences between candidates of different parties (and of the same party) in a much more discriminating way than FPTP. In our view, this would enhance local accountability.

Fourthly, STV is a wholly constituency-based system, and as such it meets local people's concerns to have identifiable local elected representatives to speak on behalf of themselves and their areas. Again we have to acknowledge an element of compromise here – the clarity and direct accountability which FPTP in its single member guise achieves cannot be fully replicated by a system which relies on multi-member divisions, as STV does; and it may also be true that Independent candidates will find it less easy to be elected under STV rather than FPTP. Nevertheless, STV is clearly superior in these respects to List Systems (while retaining much of the List Systems' ability to achieve proportionality).

Finally, we see no reason to think that the introduction of STV will result in lower turnouts and fewer contested elections – indeed, we think the opposite may be true. We absolutely reject the argument that Welsh voters, faced with the task of marking their ballot papers "1,2,3,4" rather than with four "Xs", will find the prospect too daunting and will refrain from voting; such a proposition would be an insult to their, and to our, intelligence. We think it entirely possible that some voters, previously abstainers on the grounds that the parties they support had no chance of success, will now feel it worthwhile to vote. We also consider that the numbers of uncontested seats is likely to fall; given the need for fewer constituencies, it should be possible for parties to put up at least one candidate in a multi-member division, whereas the prospect of contesting several single-member divisions may be beyond them.

ix. A Hybrid - STV and AV Together?

6.31 The conclusion summarised above was not one the majority of us reached without considerable hesitation. Several of us were initially strongly attracted by arguments advanced by Dr Dafydd Trystan, of the Institute of Welsh Politics at the University of Aberystwyth. Dr Trystan contended that whereas STV was appropriate for urban or well-populated areas, the size of (multi-member) constituencies which that system requires would make it unsuitable for use in under-populated rural areas; he therefore argued that AV should be used in single member divisions in those areas. (Both systems require voters to cast preference votes – "1,2,3,4" – and so the responsibility placed on voters throughout Wales would be the same, but the consequences of those votes would be very different, depending upon whether STV or AV was being used in any particular area).

6.32 In Dr Trystan's formulation, STV and AV could be used within a given authority; so, for example, STV would be used in the existing multi-member divisions in, say, urban Swansea, and AV used for elections in the single-member divisions which exist outside the central urban area. This scheme would have the advantage that, at least initially, no large-scale electoral division boundary review would be necessary because the existing electoral geography could continue to be used. The proposal therefore had considerable attractions, but we nevertheless ultimately found it necessary to reject it.

Our View

The fundamental difficulty with this hybrid scheme is that it would work unfairly against the largest party in a local authority area. The Jenkins Commission considered a similar proposal for elections to the House of Commons, and rejected it in these terms¹⁷:

"STV in the cities would let in minority Conservative representation to the Labour heartlands... That indeed would be part of the objective of the exercise... But a necessary corollary is that there should also be minority Labour representation in the areas where the Conservatives have long reigned supreme. This would be unlikely to be forthcoming. A Conservative MP for Liverpool would not be balanced by a Labour one for Surrey or Dorset" (because in those areas AV would operate, and that is not a proportional system such as would be likely to give Labour a reasonable prospect of a seat to compensate for its almost guaranteed lost seat in Liverpool.)

Applying this to our Swansea example, we do not think that the almost certain loss by the Labour Party of one or more of its seats in, say, the Townhill electoral division under STV would be adequately compensated by applying AV in, say, the Gower division; AV could not give the Labour Party a reasonable prospect of success there.

A variant of Dr Trystan's scheme which we considered would have been for STV to be used exclusively in some authorities and AV exclusively in others. This would have avoided some of the unfairness of the original proposal, but it seemed to us to open up new difficulties, such as who would decide which system should be used where, and on the basis of what criteria? Allocating such responsibilities to, say, the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales would bring that body into areas of political controversy in a way which we could not recommend.

We felt, too, that even this watered-down version of Dr Trystan's proposal would be unfair to the Labour Party, which could expect to lose seats in those authorities operating STV without a reasonable prospect of winning compensating seats in more rural authorities using AV.

17. Report to the Independent Commission on the Voting System (1998), para. 105

The Majority's Conclusion

6.33 The majority of us therefore decided that the proposal to introduce a mix of STV in urban areas and AV in rural areas, whether within or between authorities, cannot be accepted, and we reverted to our original conclusion.

Accordingly,

The majority of us recommend that the Single Transferable Vote should be introduced throughout Wales as the system best suited to local government elections in the future. This system will allow voters to secure effective representation on each local authority of the diversity of local opinion, and a proper reflection in its composition of the diversity of local people; it continues to provide constituency-based representation for local people; and it offers the prospect of higher turnouts at local elections and fewer uncontested seats, while also enabling non-political (Independent) candidates to continue to have a reasonable chance of success in local elections.

Other Aspects of the Electoral System

6.34 The Commission's Terms of Reference required us to address three further issues relating to the electoral system:

(i) Numbers of elected members

6.35 We were asked to make recommendations on whether there is a need for significant change in the number of elected members on any or all local authorities in Wales. We approached this question bearing in mind that there was a major reduction in councillor numbers as recently as 1996, when the last local government reorganisation took effect. We also take into account that the new political management structure in Welsh local government will take some considerable time to bed down, and that it will not become clear for a number of years what implications, if any, they might have for councillor numbers. Thirdly, we bear in mind that a further reduction in councillor numbers would result in considerable additional burdens for those who remain in office. The prospect of this could serve to deter from standing that new generation of people whom we are hoping to encourage to undertake elected public service. For all these reasons

We recommend that the existing broad pattern of councillor numbers in each authority be retained.

(ii) The electoral term, and the timing of elections

6.36 We were asked to consider what should be the period of time for which a councillor is elected. Of all the issues in our remit, this question produced the most consistent set of responses. There was a very strong consensus that the existing four-year term for councillors was appropriate. We see no reason to dissent from that view.

We recommend that councillors continue to be elected to local authorities in Wales for terms of four years.

6.37 Associated with this is the question of the timing of local government elections. As we noted in Chapter 2, the Assembly Government has decided to defer the next round of local government elections in Wales until 2004, so that they do not coincide with the National Assembly elections in 2003. We considered whether that was appropriate or whether (as has recently been decided in Scotland) it would be preferable in future to have "Wales democracy days" when elections for the National Assembly and for local authorities should coincide. It could be argued, in support of such arrangements, that holding the two sets of elections together would be likely to increase turnout in the local elections, and so address some of our concerns about the health of local democracy. However, notwithstanding the Scottish Executive's decision, we think that the reasoning originally advanced by the Kerley Working Group¹⁸ is sound:

"...the higher turnout could not be claimed as an increased democratic mandate for local government: it would not bring additional voters to the polls because of their involvement in local government issues. In fact, coincident elections would tend to reduce the electorate's focus on local government issues. Conversely, separate elections would ensure that local government issues are at the heart of local government elections: this seems to us an essential part of democracy and democratic renewal."

6.38 We also note that the Kerley Working Group recommended the use of STV for local government elections in Scotland. If that recommendation is implemented, Scottish voters in May 2007 will at one and the same time be asked to vote in Scottish Parliamentary elections using AMS and in local government elections using STV. It is not a comment on the intelligence of the Scottish electorate if we say that this looks to us like a recipe for confusion among voters. In Wales, on the other hand, National Assembly elections can take place in 2007 using the existing AMS system and (if our recommendation is accepted) local government elections in 2008 using STV, a much less confusing prospect for voters. Therefore, both on grounds of principle and pragmatism,

We recommend that local government elections in Wales be held in different years from elections to the National Assembly for Wales.

(iii) Whole Council Elections

6.39 Finally, we were asked to make recommendations on whether a whole council should be elected at one time or whether elections should be organised so that a proportion of the council is elected at any one time. To a large extent our answer on this issue is determined by our recommendation on the most appropriate electoral system, since it might be quite difficult to organise part-council elections using STV. In any event, however, the strong advice we have received is that whole-council elections are to be preferred (especially in combination with four year terms), and we agree with that view.

18. Report of the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group (June 2000), para 100

We recommend that elections to local authorities in Wales continue to be organised on a whole-council basis.

Implementing STV

6.40 The majority of us finally offer some thoughts as to how our recommendation for the introduction of STV should be given practical effect. The key feature of STV for this purpose is its reliance on multi-member electoral divisions. These will need to be specified by an independent body, and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales (LGBC(W)) is the obvious candidate for the task. As was the case in the most recent review of local government electoral boundaries, the Commission would undertake its work having regard to Directions (which we assume would issue from the National Assembly). These Directions should, we think, specify that electoral divisions should normally each return between three and five members, with the exact number in each case to be determined by the LGBC(W) taking account of the number of voters in the proposed electoral area, which would be defined by the existing pattern of communities, patterns of communication and accessibility. In this way the LGBC(W) will be able to reflect the diversity of geographical circumstances in Wales which is mentioned in our Terms of Reference, while having clear parameters on councillor numbers for each authority in accordance with the (unanimous) recommendation on that issue earlier in this Chapter.

6.41 As to the timetable for implementation of the new system, it will of course require primary legislation, and that would be a matter for Parliament in its 2003-04 session. Assuming the necessary Bill becomes an Act by, say, November 2004, the National Assembly would need to approve Directions to the LGBC(W) not later than March 2005 to allow for the conduct of the necessary electoral boundary reviews to begin. The Commission should be asked to complete these reviews in all authorities by March 2007, in order to allow the National Assembly to give effect to its recommendations by Assembly Order by July 2007. Parties would then be able to select candidates during the autumn of that year, well before the first round of elections under STV, which would take place in 2008.

The majority of us recommend that the first round of local government elections in Wales under STV should take place in 2008. Primary legislation will be necessary, and we recommend that it be put in place by the end of the 2003-04 Parliamentary session. It should quickly be followed by National Assembly Directions to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales on the conduct of electoral boundary reviews. The Commission should have completed reviews of electoral areas in each local authority area by March 2007, and made recommendations both for boundaries and for the numbers of members (normally between three and five) to be returned from those electoral areas. These should be given effect in time to allow an orderly selection of candidates before the May 2008 elections.

The Electoral System - Minority View

6.42 We recommend First Past the Post in single member divisions. It is our view that the local government voting system should be clear, accountable and have a direct link between voters within an area and their councillor. We do not support the recommendation of the majority of our colleagues that STV is the best system for future local government elections. Although STV would be based on a constituency system the areas required to produce multi-member wards would be large, particularly in rural Wales. These wards would make councillors less accountable and less local. Indeed we wonder whether the recommendation for three member wards would even deliver the proportionality they aim for.

6.43 It is evident after consultation with councils and local government representatives in Wales that there is no settled will to move away from the present voting system. Indeed FPTP has received overwhelming support, being the first choice of 19 of the 22 Councils and the majority of the local councillors.

6.44 It has, also, been put to us that it is the willingness and ability of councillors to represent all voters, and to be directly answerable and accountable to them, that is the essence of true local democracy and we wholeheartedly support this opinion. We do, however, share the concern about the existing lack of diversity in the current makeup of councillors. It is not our view that changing the voting system adequately addresses this issue. Attracting younger people, working people, women and ethnic minorities to stand for local government when there are so many competing priorities and interests remains a major challenge. The Report details action recommended to attract, inform and encourage a higher level of interest and to remove some of the barriers to involvement in local government. It is also for the political parties to reach out beyond current boundaries to involve and engage others in local politics. Public service and representing communities is worthwhile and rewarding and the political parties should give time and effort to encouraging and developing members to stand as councillors. The clearest signal the political parties can show that they have a genuine commitment to tackle diversity is to have a better gender and ethnic balance in candidates and the balance should be visible in the parties' safest seats. Independents, of course, represent themselves and can come from a variety of backgrounds.

6.45 There is a perception that proportional representation in local government elections would increase the turnout. For elections to the European Parliament turnout fell in Wales when the most proportional system, the party list system, was introduced – from 36% in 1994 to 28.1% in 1999 [Wales Yearbook 2002]. We believe it is by identifying and campaigning on issues that really matter to communities that electors will be enthused to come out and vote.

6.46 We consider that modernising local government should be evolutionary not revolutionary. The councils are currently coming to terms with the new Cabinet/Scrutiny arrangements that will change the way all councils make their decisions. Any change to the voting system should carry majority support or at least a consensus from those that deliver local government in Wales. This has not been forthcoming. The introduction of these new management arrangements may well lead to calls for fewer councillors and although we support the view expressed by our colleagues that the number of councillors should be maintained the wards required to operate STV as suggested would become even larger if there were a reduction in the number of representatives.

6.47 If councillors are to remain 'local' and accountable to the people of an area or community it is essential to maintain, indeed enhance the councillor-ward link. This is why we favour the single member ward as the basis of the electoral system. It makes each councillor directly accountable to their electorate.

6.48 We therefore recommend First Past the Post in single member divisions. We however agree with the majority that councillors should be elected for four year terms, that local elections should take place in different years from Assembly elections, and that local elections should continue to be organised on a whole council basis. We also stress the importance of acting on the unanimous recommendations elsewhere in the Commission's Report to increase the number of women, people with disabilities, people from ethnic minority groups and those in paid employment who become involved in local government. We strongly agree that there is a need to make local government more representative of the community it serves but this should not be at the expense of democratic accountability.

Eleri Ebenezer

Alun Williams

List of Recommendations

For ease of reference we include here a list of all recommendations made in this Report. Readers will wish to refer to the text of our Report for explanations of the reasoning behind them.

Statistical Data

- 1 We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government, in consultation with local government, puts in place procedures to permit the collection, on a systematic basis throughout Wales, of statistics on turnout at local government elections, based on ballot paper account data. These procedures should be in place in time for the next round of elections in 2004.

Promoting Public Understanding of Local Government

- 2 We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government ask the Electoral Commission, in pursuit of its Public Awareness Strategy, to undertake an information campaign in Wales. The campaign should seek both to explain which tier of authority is responsible for which public services in Wales, and to provide information about what local government does and how it works. The campaign should be organised in time to inform voters before the next local government elections in 2004.
- 3 We recommend each local authority in Wales to consider carefully what steps it can take, as Active Citizenship enters the National Curriculum, to raise the profile and enhance the understanding of local government by young people. Each authority will want to tailor its programme to local circumstances and different age-groups, but such action might for example include role-play exercises of the type described above, perhaps visits to schools by local authority members and staff, as well as mock elections held in parallel with local government elections in 2004.
- 4 We recommend each authority to review its strategy for publicising its activities through local media, communication with local community groups and use of web-sites. At present, some authorities' web-sites are extremely informative about council and committee meetings, agendas and minutes, whereas others have little such information. We believe that every council's web-site should contain comprehensive material of this kind.
- 5 We recommend that each authority "go out to the people" by holding some committee meetings in publicly accessible venues throughout the authority's area in addition to, or instead of, meetings in council offices. These might be policy meetings particularly relevant to the locality, for example on planning issues. Alternatively, they could take the form of Question and Answer or "open-mike" sessions on issues of general importance; they could provide the electorate with opportunities to question cabinet members about specific policy initiatives or aspects of the

Best Value or Improvement process, in addition to more detailed questions about local service provision.

- 6 We recommend first, that the Welsh Assembly Government issue guidance requesting councillors to produce "annual reports" that summarise their own activities (rather than those of the council as a whole) on behalf of local people, and secondly, that councillors ensure wide publicity is given to the timing and location of their advice centres or surgeries, which should be held in easily accessible locations.
- 7 We recommend that councils establish formal methods for handling petitions from local people. These methods should include a provision for petitioners to address the appropriate council or committee meeting for a short period before debate on the issue begins. The authority's willingness to receive and consider petitions in this way should be widely publicised (and perhaps petition forms made easily available, either on-line or through more traditional mechanisms).

Improving Turnout

- 8 We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government work with the Electoral Commission to produce a (bilingual) video explaining the practical aspects of voting, and arrange for it to be made widely available, particularly to young people who will shortly become eligible to vote.
- 9 We recommend that the freepost facility (for delivering candidates' election campaign leaflets to voters) be extended to local government elections, and that the National Assembly make appropriate provision for this in its budgets for years in which local government elections occur.
- 10 We recommend that if the Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Bill, or the clause relating to elections accessibility strategies in the Bill, does not become law, any legislation implementing other recommendations in this report should include an equivalent provision.
- 11 We recommend that the age of entitlement to vote in local government elections should be reduced to 16 years. We realise that a consequence of this, as the law stands, would be that such young people could also vote in elections to the National Assembly for Wales, and we would be content with such a conclusion. It must be for others to decide whether the parliamentary franchise should similarly be amended.
- 12 We recommend that voting hours for local government elections be extended to be consistent with those for parliamentary and National Assembly elections i.e. 7.00am to 10.00pm.
- 13 We recommend that the Electoral Commission review, and if possible simplify, the wording on the declaration of identity form, and that a revised form be piloted amongst those, for example older people or those with sensory impairments, who might have particular need to make use of postal voting.

- 14 We recommend Welsh local authorities to begin to consider now in light of the experience of English authorities in May 2002 and taking account of the report of the Independent Commission on Alternative Voting Methods published earlier this year, what innovative electoral arrangements based on technological development they might want to pilot in 2004; and we suggest that the Welsh Local Government Association might usefully perform a co-ordinating role so that a comprehensive range of innovative arrangements is tested across Wales at that time.
- 15 We recommend that no further consideration be given to making voting compulsory at local government elections in Wales.

Encouraging More Candidates

- 16 We recommend that each authority should work with local political parties and with community groups to promote the idea of council membership among local people. We draw attention to the innovative magistrate shadowing scheme organised for members of ethnic minority communities by Operation Black Vote, and suggest that authorities consider similar councillor shadowing schemes, particularly for members of minority communities. It would be helpful if the Welsh Local Government Association produced guidance for its member authorities on the action they can properly take to increase the size, and enhance the diversity, of the pool of potential candidates. Political parties and organisations representing community groups should consider what action can be taken locally to encourage more people to consider becoming candidates.
- 17 We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association should build on their recent Widening Participation seminars through publicity in the ethnic minority press and similar outlets on standing for election. Such publicity could usefully refer to examples of role models drawn from currently under-represented groups to illustrate the contribution such people can play in a healthy local democracy.
- 18 We recommend that public sector organisations review their existing special leave arrangements for staff wishing to undertake council service. We note that up to 18 days paid leave per annum is normally available, but this can only go some way to covering the 90 hours per month which councillors on average spend on council service. We also recommend that public sector employers, as they increasingly move towards "competency frameworks" in assessing staff for promotion, take full and proper account of the skills and abilities which their employees who are councillors have to demonstrate as members of local authorities.
- 19 We recommend that private sector employers be encouraged to publish their policies for allowing their employees time off for public service (including elected public service), and we recommend the Welsh Assembly Government, and other public sector organisations, to take account of those statements in their procurement practices.

- 20 We recommend the Welsh Assembly Government to consider, in consultation with its partners, whether it would be practicable to introduce a compensation scheme for private and voluntary sector employers to permit them to allow their employees time off for council service. Compensation for self-employed people for time given for council service should also be considered in any such arrangements.
- 21 We recommend the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association jointly to establish and run an annual award scheme which recognises private and voluntary employers who are most supportive of employees wishing to serve as councillors.
- 22 We recommend the Welsh Assembly Government, after consultation with the Associations representing town and community councils in Wales, to issue guidance to community councils that vacancies to be filled by co-option should be widely advertised in their areas, with particular attention paid to informing local community groups and young peoples' organisations about these vacancies.
- 23 We recommend that councils review their existing training and induction programmes for new councillors and bring them fully up to date with the modernising agenda. We hope that examples of best practice in this respect can be widely shared among authorities. Informal mentoring schemes for new members may have a part to play in this.
- 24 We recommend that the requirement for the number of signatures in support of nominations of candidates for local government elections be brought into line with that for National Assembly elections i.e. that each candidate's nomination should have to be supported by the signatures of two electors rather than ten, as at present.
- 25 We recommend that nomination forms for candidates should be available on-line, and that they should also be easily obtainable and returnable by post rather than in person as some authorities require.
- 26 We also recommend that the minimum age for candidates is reduced from 21 to 18 (but not to 16, which is the age we have recommended should entitle individuals to vote). We do this, not in the expectation that many 18 year old candidates will suddenly emerge, but rather because it will enable community councils to co-opt those aged 18 and over to fill vacancies, and so perhaps persuade such young people in due time to move forward to stand for county/county borough councils.
- 27 We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government endorse the Wales Charter for Councillors as a statement of aspiration, and discuss with its partners in the partnership councils what steps can now be taken by interested parties to ensure that the Charter's provisions are given full effect.

The Electoral System

- 28 We recommend that the existing broad pattern of councillor numbers in each authority be retained.
- 29 We recommend that councillors continue to be elected to local authorities in Wales for terms of four years.
- 30 We recommend that local government elections in Wales be held in different years from elections to the National Assembly for Wales.
- 31 We recommend that elections to local authorities in Wales continue to be organised on a whole-council basis.
- 32 The majority of us recommend that the Single Transferable Vote should be introduced throughout Wales as the system best suited to local government elections in the future. This system will allow voters to secure effective representation on each local authority of the diversity of local opinion, and a proper reflection in its composition of the diversity of local people; it continues to provide constituency-based representation for local people; and it offers the prospect of higher turnouts at local elections and fewer uncontested seats, while also enabling non-political (Independent) candidates to continue to have a reasonable chance of success in local elections.*
- 33 The majority of us recommend that the first round of local government elections in Wales under STV should take place in 2008. Primary legislation will be necessary, and we recommend that it be put in place by the end of the 2003-04 Parliamentary session. It should quickly be followed by National Assembly Directions to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales on the conduct of electoral boundary reviews. The Commission should have completed reviews of electoral areas in each local authority area by March 2007, and made recommendations both for boundaries and for the numbers of members (normally between three and five) to be returned from those electoral areas. These should be given effect in time to allow an orderly selection of candidates before the May 2008 elections.*
- * These two recommendations reflect the Majority View of the Commission. The Minority View is presented on pages 56 to 57 of the Report.

Appendix 1

Commission Membership

Professor Eric Sunderland OBE (Chair)

Eric Sunderland, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales, Bangor, has recently retired as President of the University of Wales, Lampeter and as Chairman of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales. He was Chief Counting Officer for the referendum on Welsh Devolution in 1997. He currently serves as Lord Lieutenant of Gwynedd.

Angharad Closs Stephens

Angharad Closs Stephens is a politics graduate of Aberystwyth University and has undertaken research on positive action in elections. She was Chair of the Plaid Cymru Federation of Students and UMCA President at Aberystwyth. She is currently completing a Masters degree course in Gender Studies at the London School of Economics.

Eleri Ebenezer

Eleri Ebenezer is the Chair of the Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust. She previously served as a Conservative councillor in the London Borough of Ealing for 16 years until 1994.

Mari James

Mari James is managing Director of GJW Cymru Wales, a political consultancy company based in Cardiff. She was a member of the National Assembly Advisory Group and the Assembly Preparations Group and Vice Chair of the "Yes for Wales" campaign for the devolution referendum.

Tony Roberts OBE

Tony Roberts worked for thirty years in local government, most recently as Chief Executive of Cynon Valley Borough Council until 1996. He is now a non-executive director of Tower Colliery PLC.

Lord Thomas of Gresford QC

Martin Thomas QC became a life peer in 1996. Lord Thomas has held many offices in the Welsh Liberal and Liberal Democratic Party, including its Presidency from 1993-97.

Jacky Tonge

Jacky Tonge is the Chief Executive of Powys County Council, which covers 2000 square miles, contains 125,000 residents and has 73 elected council members.

Alun Williams

Alun Williams is Area Organiser for USDAW. He was a member of the Executive of Labour Party Wales for 16 years and sat on the Labour Party Commission which drew up proposals for the Assembly election system. He also held constituency office in Cynon Valley Labour Party for 29 years up to 1998.

Charlotte Williams

A lecturer in Social Policy at Bangor University, Charlotte Williams is also a member of Mewn Cymru and serves on the North Wales Race Equality Network Executive and the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association Steering Group.

Appendix 2

The Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales

Terms of Reference for the Commission's work are:

To identify the objectives of an electoral system for local government in Wales giving consideration to all factors which the Commission consider relevant and including:

- the level of participation in local government elections
- the capacity of each elected member to represent his or her electors in ways that reflect the expectations of electors
- the capacity of the whole council to reflect the diversity of interests and values in the local community
- the capacity of the council to provide effective and transparent leadership which reflects the electoral choices of the electorate
- the capacity of the council to provide effective arrangements for scrutinising and holding its leadership to account.

To have regard for the developments in political management which follow from the Local Government Act 2000; forms of management which are required to be efficient, transparent and accountable with clear delegations of responsibility for decision making and with effective arrangements for scrutiny and accountability.

To have regard for the diversity of geographical circumstances of councils in Wales: diversity in the size and dispersion of populations served, the relationship between electoral areas and natural communities.

To have regard to the tradition in some parts of Wales of elected members who are independent of political parties.

To make recommendations on the electoral term; i.e. what should be the period of time for which a councillor is elected.

To make recommendations on whether a whole Council should be elected at one time or whether elections should be organised so that a proportion of the council is elected at any one time.

To consider making recommendations on electoral procedures having regard to the considerations currently being undertaken by the Home Office:

- the timing of local elections
- the location of polling stations
- the potential for increasing postal voting
- the potential for electronic voting

To make recommendations on whether there is a need for significant change in the number of elected members on any or all local authorities in Wales

To make recommendations on the system of election, giving consideration to any system that the Commission considers relevant and including

- First Past the Post
- List Systems
- Additional Member System
- Alternative Vote and Supplementary Vote
- Single Transferable Vote
- A Combination of Alternative Vote and Additional Member

Appendix 3

List of Organisations and Individuals Submitting Evidence

Section A – Local Authorities and Individual Members

- (1) Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- (2) Blaenau Gwent Independent Opposition
- (3) Bridgend County Borough Council
- (4) Caerphilly County Borough Council
- (4a) Caerphilly County Borough Council (supplement)
- (5) Cardiff County Council
- (5a) Cardiff County Council (supplement)
- (6) Ceredigion Independent group
- (7) Councillor Den Hughes
- (8) Councillor E M Jones
- (9) Councillor Eric Griffiths
- (9a) Councillor Eric Griffiths (supplement)
- (10) Councillor Gwyn Hopkins
- (11) Councillor Gwyn John
- (12) Councillor H M Bebell
- (13) Councillor I L Roberts
- (14) Councillor K Armstrong Braun
- (15) Councillor Leighton Smart
- (16) Councillor Richard Bertin
- (17) Councillor Richard Tyler
- (18) Councillor Rob Curtis
- (19) Councillor VMJ & Mr DM Roach
- (20) Councillor W B Thomas
- (21) Councillor W I B James
- (22) Conwy County Borough Council
- (23) Flintshire County Council
- (24) Flintshire Non Aligned group
- (25) Gwynedd County Council
- (26) Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- (27) Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- (27a) Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (supplement)
- (28) Newport County Borough Council
- (29) Pembrokeshire County Council
- (30) Powys County Council
- (31) Torfaen County Borough Council
- (32) Ynys Môn County Council

Section B – Town and Community Councils

- (33) A Clements
- (34) Aber Valley Community Council
- (35) Abergele Community Council
- (36) Beaumaris Community Council
- (37) Denbigh Community Council
- (38) Ewenny Community Council
- (39) Flint Town Council
- (40) Gelligaer Community Council
- (41) Graig Community Council
- (42) Holywell Town Council
- (43) Lamphey Town Council
- (44) Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa Community Council
- (45) Llangyniew Community Council
- (46) Llanharen Community Council
- (47) Llantilio Crossenny Community Council
- (48) Llwchwr Town Council
- (49) Margaret Jones
- (50) Mawr Community Council
- (51) Michaelston Community Council
- (52) Milford Haven Town Council
- (53) National Association of Local Councils
- (54) Pembroke Town Council
- (55) Penarth Town Council
- (56) Pontyclun Community Council
- (57) Porthcawl Town Council
- (58) Swansea Neath Port Talbot Area Committee – Wales Association of Community and Town Councils
- (59) Welshpool Town Council
- (60) Whitford Community Council

Section C – Voluntary Organisations, Public Bodies and Others

- (61) All Wales Ethnic Minority Association
- (62) Chief Fire Officer Simon Smith (North Wales Fire Authority)
- (63) Disability Rights Commission
- (64) Evangelical Alliance
- (65) Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales
- (66) Neath Port Talbot Access Group
- (67) Wales Council for the Deaf
- (68) Welsh Local Government Association
- (68a) Welsh Local Government Association (Appendix)

Section D – Political Parties

- (69) Alyn & Deeside Labour group
- (70) Beddau Tynant ward Labour group
- (71) Blaenau Gwent Constituency Labour Party
- (72) Caerphilly Liberal Democrats
- (73) Cardiff County Council Liberal Democrat group
- (74) Cardiff County Labour group
- (75) Carmarthenshire County Council Labour group
- (76) Conservative group at the National Assembly for Wales
- (77) Conwy County Borough Council Liberal Democrat group
- (78) Conwy Constituency Labour Party
- (79) Flintshire County Council Labour group
- (80) Gwynedd County Council Labour group
- (81) Newport Liberal Democrats
- (82) Neath Port Talbot & Northern Lliw County Borough Labour Party
- (83) Plaid Cymru – the Party of Wales
- (84) Plaid Cymru Caerphilly
- (85) Plaid Cymru group Carmarthenshire County Council
- (86) Plaid Cymru group Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- (87) Plaid Cymru group Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
- (88) Swansea and Gower Liberal Democrats
- (89) Wales Green Party
- (90) Wales Labour Party
- (91) Welsh Conservative Party
- (92) Welsh Liberal Democrats

Section E – Assembly Members

- (93) Gwenda Thomas AM
- (94) Huw Lewis AM
- (95) Lynne Neagle AM
- (96) Peter Black AM

Section F – Members of Parliament

- (97) Chris Bryant MP
- (98) Chris Ruane MP & Martyn Jones MP
- (99) Dai Harvard MP
- (100) Jackie Lawrence MP
- (101) Jon Owen Jones MP
- (102) Julie Morgan MP
- (103) Kevin Brennan MP
- (104) Lembit Öpik MP
- (105) Wayne David MP

Section G – Academics and Research Establishments

- (106) Constitution Unit, University of London – Professor Robert Hazell
- (107) Electoral Reform Society
- (108) Institute of Welsh Politics – Dr Dafydd Trystan
- (109) University of Wales Institute Cardiff – Dr Russell Deacon
- (110) Welsh Governance Centre – Barry Jones

Section H – General Public

- (111) A P Clark
- (112) Alan Hall
- (113) Allan Jones
- (114) Andrew Burns
- (115) Anthony Tuffin
- (116) Arthur James
- (117) Christopher Slade
- (118) David Fouweather
- (119) G A Wareing
- (120) Gareth Davies
- (121) Gary Lewis
- (122) Geoff Roberts
- (123) H G Jones
- (124) Joan Bird
- (125) John Hudson
- (126) Jonathan Morgan
- (127) Lyndon Moore
- (128) P W Davies
- (129) R Clare
- (130) Richard Harrison
- (131) Richard Lung
- (132) Roger Burns
- (133) Roger Evans
- (134) S Baker
- (135) S Roberts
- (136) Simon Cussons
- (137) Steve Creitzman
- (138) Sue James
- (139) Sue Jones
- (140) Tom Ellis

Appendix 4

Improving Local Democracy

Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales

Consultations Winter 2001/2

Who are we?

- independent advisory body
- set up by the Assembly Cabinet
- to examine electoral arrangements for electing county/county borough councils in Wales

Why?

- Local accountability
 - council elections
- Voting arrangements
 - produce council reflecting local wishes and needs
- Council services
 - Quality of life

Our remit

- voting systems
- reflecting diversity issues and equal opportunities
- uncontested seats
- frequency of voting
- turn-out
- voting process

Voting systems

Currently

- First past the post
- Whole council elections every 4 years
- some from single member divisions;
- but many from 2/3/4/5 member divisions.

Current system

- Pros
 - familiar?
 - simple?
 - clear link between councillor and area represented?
- Cons
 - unfair results?
 - wasted votes?
 - too many safe seats?

Options (voting systems)

- Party List System
- Additional Member System
- Single Transferable Vote
- Alternative Vote
- Single Transferable Vote & Alternative Vote
- Supplementary Vote
- Alternative Vote
- or
- No change?

Diversity and Equality of Opportunity

Councillor profile

- A typical county councillor in Wales is...
 - male
 - white
 - retired
 - aged 55+
- Is this appropriate today..?

Representativeness

1. Size of councils

- Currently range from 33 to 83
 - approx. 1 councillor per 1,750 voters
- But with new executive arrangements...
 - do we need as many?

Representativeness

2. Uncontested seats

1 in 6 councillors in Wales serves without having been voted into office by any electors

1999 (figs. rounded)

	<i>Cllrs unopposed</i>	<i>% of seats</i>	<i>% of voters</i>
Wales	211	16	13
Powys	38	52	51
Gwynedd	42	50	49
Bridgend	12	22	20
Scotland	56	4	

Frequency of elections

- Currently
 - whole council
 - every 4 years
- Alternatives
 - election by thirds
 - annual
 - every 2 years

Turn-out

- How do we combat increasing voter apathy?
 - 73% (Gen Election 97)
 - 61% (Gen Election 2001)
 - 49% in contested seats (local govt 1999)
 - 46% (NAW 1999)

(figs for Wales only - rounded)

Voting process

- More accessible...?
 - postal voting
 - weekend voting
 - extended hours
 - 16/17 year olds voting
 - civics
 - electronic voting
 - internet voting
 - reaching people with disabilities and the marginalised

What can I do?

- Let us know your views
- public meetings
- contact us
- Web-site

What next?

- End of consultation: 31 Jan 2002
- Report to Assembly Ministers July 2002
- Assembly debate and decision
- Bill in Parliament?

Appendix 5

Distribution of single and multi-member electoral divisions per authority

Authority	No of Electoral Divisions	Electoral Divisions According to No of Members Returned					Total No of Members
		1	2	3	4	5	
Blaenau Gwent	16	-	7	8	1	-	42
Bridgend	39	28	8	2	1	-	54
Caerphilly	33	7	14	10	2	-	73
Cardiff	29	5	7	12	5	-	75
Carmarthenshire	58	42	16	-	-	-	74
Ceredigion*	40	38	2	-	-	-	42
Conwy	38	22	12	3	1	-	59
Denbighshire	30	16	11	3	-	-	47
Flintshire	57	44	13	-	-	-	70
Gwynedd*	71	67	4	-	-	-	75
Merthyr Tydfil	11	-	3	5	3	-	33
Monmouthshire*	42	41	1	-	-	-	43
Neath Port Talbot	42	27	8	7	-	-	64
Newport*	20	2	7	10	1	-	50
Pembrokeshire	60	60	-	-	-	-	60
Powys	73	73	-	-	-	-	73
Rhondda Cynon Taff	52	31	19	2	-	-	75
Swansea	36	18	8	4	4	2	72
Torfaen**	24	11	6	7	-	-	44
Vale of Glamorgan*	23	6	12	3	2	-	47
Wrexham	47	42	5	-	-	-	52
Ynys Môn	40	40	-	-	-	-	40

Authorities marked with an * or ** are those where the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales's recommendations have still to be implemented; the Assembly Minister for Local Government exercised her power to make a modification to the Commission's proposals for Torfaen.

Appendix 6

Census of Local Authority Councillors 2001

(Results for Welsh Unitary Authorities only)

Total Number of expected responses : 1270

Section A – About yourself :

	No.	%
Gender (A1)		
Male	1,027	81
Female	241	19
Total	1,268	100
Did not Answer	2	

	No.	%
Age (A2)		
<25	2	0.2
25-34	19	1.6
35-44	117	9.63
45-54	234	19.2
55-59	230	18.8
60-64	183	15
65-69	211	17.3
70-74	168	13.8
75+	55	4.5
Total	1,221	100
Did not answer	49	
Average Age of Respondents : 59		

	No.	%
Ethnic Origin (A3)		
White	1,257	99
Mixed	11	0.8
Asian /Asian British	2	0.2
Chinese	0	0
Other Ethnic Groups	0	0
Total	1,270	100

	No.	%
Employment Status (A6)		
Full time paid employment	245	19.5
Part time paid employment	83	6.6
Self employed	200	16
Unemployed	26	2
Retired	605	48.2
Permanently sick /Disabled	34	2.7
Looking after home & family	32	2.5
Full time education	2	0.2
Not working (other reasons)	28	2.2
Total	1,255	100
Did not answer	15	
(A7) Number who responded as full time councillors : 601		

Current Occupation (A8)		
Managerial or Executive	177	33.7
Professional or Technical	162	30.9
Lecturer, Teacher or Researcher	45	8.5
Admin/Clerical/ Secretarial/ Sales	77	14.6
Manual or Craft	64	12.2
Total of those who responded	524	100
Did not answer	746	

Sector of Employment (A9)			
Public Sector	Local Government	51	10
	Central Government	38	7.5
	NHS	36	7.1
	Other Public Sector	70	13.7
	Private Sector	279	54.6
	Voluntary Sector	36	7.1
Total of those who responded		511	100
Did not answer		759	

	No.	%
Education and Qualifications (A11)		
Degree / Higher Degree / NVQ 4 or 5	337	26.6
Professional Qualification	228	18
HNC / Diploma / NVQ 4 or 5	77	6.1
GCE 'A' Level / NVQ 3	51	4
ONC / Diploma / NVQ 3	30	2.4
GCSE / GCE 'O' level / NVQ 2	151	12
CSE / NVQ 1	21	1.7
Other	92	7.3
None of these	277	21.9
Total	1,264	100
Did not answer	6	

Section B

How long a Councillor (B1)		
1 Year	43	3.4
2 Years	109	8.6
3 Years	268	21.3
4 Years	26	2
5 Years	36	2.9
6-9 Years	198	15.7
10-15 Years	262	20.8
16-20 Years	128	10.2
21-25 Years	72	5.8
> 25 Years	117	9.3
Total	1,259	100
Did not answer	11	
Average number of years as a Councillor : 11		

Are you a member of (B2) (percentage of all Councillors)		
Another Local Authority	38	3
Parish / Town / Community Councils	603	47.5

When elected last did you stand as a candidate for? (B3)		
Conservative Party	104	8.3
Labour Party	509	40.4
Liberal Democrat Party	115	9.1
Plaid Cymru	192	15.2
Green Party	17	1.4
Independent	298	23.7
Other	26	2
Total	1,261	100
Did not answer	9	

Appendix 7

Turnout and share of the vote

Our consideration of the most appropriate voting system required us to look at how the different systems produced results which reflected the political choices of voters; our terms of reference, acknowledging concerns about turnout, specifically invited us to consider the "level of participation in local government elections". We therefore considered accurate statistics on levels of turnout at local government elections in Wales and the distribution of votes between candidates and parties at those elections to be essential tools for our work. Obtaining reliable statistics for both parts of the exercise proved more difficult than we had expected.

Turnout

Most newspapers reporting election results in this country include details of turnout – at both the overall level and the constituency / electoral division level. Generally speaking, where the contests allow the voter to cast one vote only (whether for a candidate or a party list) the turnout figure is derived from adding together the votes declared as cast for each candidate and comparing the total valid vote with the total electorate eligible to vote in that particular election. This presents two immediate challenges – the accuracy of the electorate figure and the wisdom of excluding spoiled ballot papers from the turnout calculation. There are particular difficulties in using vote totals to calculate voter turnout in multi-member divisions because there is no way of knowing (from the declared totals) how many voters used the full allocation of votes which they were entitled to cast in that division.

Calculating the Electorate: The electorate figure published by a returning officer at election time has varied according to the practice of the local authority. Some returning officers use for turnout calculations the number of voters who were on the register for that electoral area when the register was "first published" ie in mid February in the year of the election. That register would have been compiled on the basis of a canvass taken the previous October, so when an election falls in May an electorate figure based on the register "as first published" will already be seven months out of date.

Other returning officers use the numbers of those who were entitled to vote on polling day. This would include primarily those who had reached (or "attained") the age of 18 and so become eligible to vote between the date on which the register came into force (16 February) and polling day – the "attainers". It would also cover any person who had made a successful case that he or she should have been included in the register when it was first published but for some reason were inadvertently excluded. This latter category is made up usually of a small handful of corrected administrative errors; it does not include people who had moved into the area since the canvass was held.

A figure based on those entitled to vote on polling day would certainly be more accurate and more up to date than one based on the register as first published. However, even the more up to date version is likely to include errors, since the returning officer may not have been able to delete the names of registered voters who had died or for some other reason lost their right to vote (eg having been committed to prison or an asylum).

We approached the electoral services in all 22 local authorities and all were able to provide us with the electorate figures they used for the 1999 elections. Some had used the figure "as first published", others had been able to update for the figure on voting day and a few were uncertain which methodology had been used. (In the last cases this was generally because of staff changes and departures since the 1999 election).

Spoiled votes: we consider that calculating turnout only on the basis of valid votes cast at an election is an incomplete indicator of the level of participation. Such a calculation does not include those ballot papers which were issued to eligible voters, but which were not used to cast a valid vote. There are various reasons why a vote may not be deemed valid:

- the lack of the official stamp on the ballot paper;
- the voter may have marked the paper in such a way as would give away his or her identity;
- the voter may have "voted" more times than he or she was supposed to;
- the voter may have made no mark on the paper;
- or they may simply have scribbled all over it.

Such invalid ballot papers are deemed to be "spoiled" and are not considered for the counting of votes. The number of spoiled ballot papers is announced by category by the returning officer at the end of the election. We believe that in calculating turnout the spoiled ballot papers should be taken into consideration. Even if the voter has for some reason or other been unable to express a clear choice between the options available the fact that they have presented themselves at the polling station and taken their ballot paper is an expression of a desire to participate.

For this reason we believe that the calculation of turnout should always be based on the number of ballot papers issued at the election. These figures are readily available to returning officers from the ballot paper account prepared for each polling station at the close of the poll. These statistics are then collated for the ballot paper report and used to check the contents of the ballot boxes at verification. Election officers have assured us that a calculation of turnout based on ballot papers issued in relation to electorate is the most accurate and is practicable – as long as the methodology is agreed beforehand. Insofar as

counting postal ballot papers is concerned, however, the general view appears to be that only those returned to the returning officer should be counted for turnout purposes – whether they are deemed valid or spoiled and also if they are returned too late for the votes to be counted.

In light of the above, the table below, presenting turnout figures in the 1999 Welsh local government elections is no more than a best estimate. For each authority, unless indicated otherwise, we have obtained from the relevant electoral services the figure of ballot papers issued in polling stations at the election, the number of postal votes returned and the electorate (howsoever calculated). The table is based on figures across the whole authority, but in most cases we were also able to obtain details at the electoral division level. However, even where local authorities still have figures available the different practices in terms of calculating electorate, the cut-off point for counting returned postal votes and the detail of internal reports militates against consistency. Nevertheless, we believe that the information provided does enable us to make a reasonably accurate estimate of turnout in 1999.

The first column headed "Turnout" in the table is the calculation of the percentage of ballot papers issued at the election against "electorate" across that local authority as a whole. It takes no account of whether or not there were uncontested divisions in that authority. The second "Turnout" column is based on the number of ballot papers issued at the election, but against the total electorate only in those divisions where a contest took place. We believe both figures are worthy of consideration. The second figure indicates the proportion of people who made the effort to turn out and vote where they had the opportunity; the first highlights the extent of disenfranchisement arising from the lack of contests and also might be said to highlight the democratic legitimacy of the elected council.

There may well be some variations between our figures and those which have been published previously in other sources (eg newspapers reporting the election results and in the reference work by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher – "Local Elections Handbook 1999"). We suspect that these may arise largely where the publishers were unable to obtain details of ballot papers issued direct from the elections services and so had to use some other methodology. For ease of reference the third "Turnout" column in our table gives the published figure from Rallings' and Thrasher's work.

Table: Turnout in local government elections in Wales in 1999

	Electorate	Number of Ballot Papers Issued	Turnout * (%)	Turnout ** (%)	R&T Turnout
Ynys Môn	51740	26595	51.4	60.7	59.5
Blaenau Gwent	54081	26749	49.5	49.5	63.3
Bridgend	100581	34510	36.1	43.4	43.1
Caerphilly	131922	57287	43.4	44.9	51.1
Cardiff	231131	99353	43	43	49.7
Carmarthenshire	133802	55859	41.7	55.8	57.5
Ceredigion	55069	21133	38.4	58.2	63
Conwy	88142	35818	40.6	46.3	55
Denbighshire	68374	30687	44.9	46.9	51.7
Flintshire	114335	38193	33.4	41.7	42
Gwynedd	90745	29149	32.1	62.7	62.8
Merthyr Tydfil	43612	20502	47	47	58.1
Monmouthshire	66227	30526	46.1	48.3	52.2
Neath Port Talbot	106216	45248	42.6	48.2	54.9
Newport	100669	39668	39.4	39.4	43.5
Pembrokeshire	88264	33923	38.4	53.4	52.7
Powys	97902	25291	25.8	53.6	55.4
Rhondda Cynon Taff	173949	86753	49.9	50.3	50.1
Swansea	175732	71940	40.9	42.6	50
Torfaen	69862	24004	34.4	41.4	43.8
Vale of Glamorgan	87632	43097	49.2	49.2	52.6
Wrexham	97494	28761	29.5	40.9	39.5
	2227481	905046	40.6	47.1	50.9

* Turnout calculated across county and includes uncontested divisions.

** Turnout calculated against electorate in contested divisions only.

R&T - published figures in Local Elections Handbook 1999, compiled by Rallings and Thrasher.

Share of the Vote

The existence of multi-member electoral divisions and the high level of uncontested seats makes it impossible to devise a methodology for calculating precisely the distribution of votes between candidates and parties at Welsh local government elections. Even in authorities where all divisions are single member, such as Pembrokeshire and Ynys Môn / Anglesey, the high level of non contested seats distorts any calculation of distributions.

In the multi-member seats we have concluded that the methodology used by Rallings and Thrasher provides as satisfactory an estimate of share of the votes as is possible. Their methodology, described on page xii of the 1999 Local Elections Handbook, involves taking the vote of the best-placed candidate for each party to calculate the share of the total vote. This has dangers in that it presumes that voters vote consistently for the candidates of one banner and that banner only, no matter how many votes the voter may be entitled to and how many candidates their chosen party may have put up. Thus if there is only one Liberal Democrat candidate in a three member division, the Rallings and Thrasher methodology effectively presumes that supporters of that candidate will vote once only and will not use their other entitlements to vote for any of the other candidates on the ballot paper. Despite these reservations we have been unable to come up with any other methodology, so all references to shares of the vote – at the all-county level and at the electoral division level - are derived from the 1999 Local Elections Handbook.

Appendix 8

THE WALES CHARTER FOR COUNCILLORS

This Charter recognises the fundamental importance of:-

- Local councils leading their communities
- Councils being representative of the communities they serve
- Councillors providing democratic leadership, scrutiny of services and high standards of conduct
- Councillors being supported, equipped and developed to fully undertake their roles
- Public service as an elected councillor being fully valued

The Charter is a statement by local authorities in Wales of their intention to enhance and promote their ongoing training and development programmes aimed at enabling members to undertake the vital role they play in representing their communities, and where appropriate, as ambassadors for local government at the regional and national levels. These programmes are of particular importance at this time when, in the new governance of Wales, the role of local government has been and is being enhanced. The Charter draws on current arrangements in place throughout Wales, reflects best practice and provides a set of specific commitments.

Within this the Charter recognises that local councils each have responsibility for the development and support of their elected members and for determining how and by whom training and support is given.

The Charter does not seek to introduce a qualification or standards for service as an elected member; rather it seeks to support all councillors in fulfilling their role and in highlighting the value of public service to the community as an elected representative.

To achieve these aims local government seeks the support of its partner organisations.

This Charter therefore calls on:-

- Local authorities in Wales
- Political parties
- The business community
- Public sector partners
- Senior officers' organisations

to sign and signify commitment to its principles.

Commitments

Local authorities in Wales commit themselves to:-

- Agreeing a development strategy for all councillors based on the council's key aims and priorities
- Establishing an annual development programme for councillors which recognises new roles and responsibilities, identifies individual learning needs and is based on the principles of good practice
- Examining the way its business is conducted to facilitate the involvement of people with family and work commitments as councillors
- Developing a strategy to encourage under- represented groups in the community to consider service as councillors

The Business Community in Wales commits itself to:-

- Supporting and encouraging its employees who wish to pursue public service as elected councillors
- Recognising the value of service made by councillors to local society
- Recognising the enhancement of skills and competencies which service as a local councillor brings to the individual and their employer
- Supporting the involvement of previously under-represented groups as councillors

Political parties in Wales commit themselves to:-

- Providing information, training and guidance to prospective local authority councillors
- Striving to ensure selected candidates are fully representative of their communities
- Encouraging the support and participation of elected councillors in development programmes

The Public Sector Organisations commit themselves to:-

- Supporting and encouraging their staff and members who wish to pursue public service as elected councillors
- Recognising the value of service as a councillor to local society
- Recognising the enhancement of skills and competencies which service as a local councillor brings to the individual and the organisation
- Promoting the importance of development of local authority councillors
- Assisting in actively working towards local authority councillors being representative of the communities they serve

The Senior Officer Organisations commit themselves to:-

- Playing an active role in the national debate on the value of public service
- Raising the awareness of their officers to the importance of councillor development
- Encouraging their officers to play an active role in helping their own councils achieve their commitments under the Charter

Appendix 9

Electoral Systems: The options on Offer

The Commission was asked to include an examination of the following voting systems:

1. First Past The Post (also known as Simple Majority)
2. Party list
3. Additional Member System (also known as Mixed Member Proportional)
4. Single Transferable Vote
5. Alternative Vote
6. Supplementary Vote
7. Alternative Vote plus

1. First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) – also known as Simple Majority System

How the System Works:

Under First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) the emphasis is upon a direct link and clear accountability between the voter and his / her elected representative. The representative represents a designated electoral area ("constituency", "electoral division", "ward" etc) and each of those areas has a fixed number of representatives. In the ballot for those representatives the voters in the electoral area have as many votes as there are representatives. If the electoral area has one representative, voters in that area have one vote, but if there are three representatives, the voters are entitled to three votes. Voters may choose to cast all or just some of their votes. In the UK, voters mark their choice (or choices) by putting an 'X' on the ballot paper next to the name (names) of the candidate (candidates) they support. Under FPTP the percentage of votes won by a candidate in a ballot has no direct bearing on the allocation of the seats for that area. The determining factors are the candidate's position in the final tally of votes and the number of representatives that the electoral area has on the body for which the election is held. Thus, in an electoral area with one representative, the candidate who gets the most votes in the ballot wins the seat; in an electoral area with three seats, the three candidates with the most votes all win seats.

Where the system is used: for elections to the House of Commons, the US Houses of Congress, the Canadian and Australian lower houses of parliament. For local government elections in the UK and in USA, Canada and India.

2. Party List System

How the System Works:

The party list system is one of the more commonly used systems of proportional representation. The main principle of proportional representation is that the number of representatives each political grouping has in an elected body should broadly reflect the proportion of the total vote won by that grouping in the election to that body.

In a party list system voters cast a single vote, choosing between lists of candidates drawn up by political parties. All the votes cast for each party list in an electoral area are counted and each party receives seats in the area roughly in the same proportion as the votes it won in that area.

The electoral areas tend to be large both in geographical size and numbers of voters and several representatives are elected from each electoral area. Sometimes the entire electoral body may be elected from a single electoral area, covering the entire area for which the body is responsible; alternatively, the electoral body may have several electoral areas and a separate party list ballot is held in each.

Each political party putting forward a list of candidates ranks its candidates according to its own preference. The number of candidates a party includes on a list varies – and may depend on the rules for the election in question and/or the availability of candidates to the party. In general, the upper limit will correspond to the number of seats available in the electoral area; alternatively the list may include just one name. Candidates not standing for a political party may be allowed to contest party list elections as independent candidates – in which case, each independent candidate is treated, effectively, as if he or she were a party list of one.

The names of the candidates making up a party list may or may not be included on the ballot paper. The higher the number of representatives elected from the electoral area the more difficult it becomes to include the names of the list candidates on the ballot paper. In these cases other arrangements will be made for publicising candidates' names – eg displaying them on the walls of polling stations or including them in official leaflets distributed before the election.

Once the votes for each party list have been counted a formula is used to calculate the number of seats each party is entitled to. There are several formulae in use. Each party's seat entitlement is then allocated among the candidates on that party's list; generally the candidates declared elected would be those placed highest in the party's list of candidates. So, if a party list is entitled to three seats those seats will be allocated to the three highest placed candidates on the list.

Generally under party list systems, voters simply vote for the political party and they have no say as to which of the candidates on the party's list are elected. This is called the **closed list** system. A variation, called the **open list** system, allows the voter to vote either for the list as published or to vote for a preferred individual candidate on that list, wherever that candidate appears on the list. The possible effect of this is to alter the order in which candidates have been placed on the list, and therefore the list of successful candidates, while still registering support for the voter's preferred party.

The system is used: in parliamentary elections in several countries in continental Europe and Israel and was used in Great Britain for the 1999 European Parliamentary Elections - using the closed list system.

3. Additional Member System (AMS)

How the System Works:

The Additional Member System is another form of proportional representation. It was developed for use in the new Federal Republic of Germany after the Second World War. It attempts to combine, in a single voting system, features of First-Past-The-Post and the Party List System. The objective is to retain the clear link between a representative and his / her electoral area and, at the same time, provide a mechanism to compensate for a lack of proportionality which sometimes arises from elections conducted entirely under FPTP.

Under the AMS the elected body is made up of representatives who are elected either by FPTP from single member electoral areas or by the party list system. Each voter in an AMS election has two votes, one for a candidate for a single member electoral area and the other for a party list. The party list ballot will cover either the whole area covered by the electoral body or sub-divisions of that area. If the latter, the sub-division must still be made up of a number of whole single member electoral areas. This geographic link is essential - since the purpose of the party list (or "additional") seats is to provide a means of correcting a lack of proportionality in the overall results from the single member ballots.

The election of the representative for each single member electoral area is conducted on the same basis as elections under FPTP (see section 1 above). The party list ballot is conducted under the principles outlined in section 2 above - up to the point where the party list seats are to be allocated. The allocation of the party list seats under AMS is calculated using a formula which takes account of the single member seats each party has already won in the area covered by the party list ballot. The effect of the formula is that if the number of single member seats a party has won does not really reflect its level of support, it should gain some of the party list seats. Overall, the final distribution of seats in the elected body (taking account of single member and party list representatives) should then reflect the distribution of votes between the parties.

Once a party's entitlement to party list seats has been determined, the seats are allocated to candidates on that party's list on the same basis as in straightforward party list elections. Again, there is the option of using open or closed lists.

The ratio of party list seats to single member seats in an electoral body may vary, but, generally, the higher the proportion of party list seats, the more likelihood there is of the overall result being precisely proportional.

The system is used: for elections to the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament, the Greater London Assembly, in Germany and for parliamentary elections in New Zealand (where it is called Mixed Member Proportional Representation or MMP).

4. Single Transferable Vote (STV)

How the System Works:

The single transferable vote (STV) was invented in the 19th century and is another form of proportional representation.

Under STV, voters are asked to vote for candidates in designated electoral areas. Each electoral area will have several representatives – normally at least three, but often more. Candidates may stand with or without the formal backing of a political party and the names of all candidates appear on the ballot paper.

Voters give a preference ranking to as many candidates on the ballot paper as they wish, in numerical order: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc. The political parties may have put forward as many candidates as there are seats in the electoral area, but when indicating their preferences voters may choose to rank candidates in any order they wish regardless of party affiliations.

In order to win a seat, a candidate must receive a specified "quota" of votes in the electoral area. This quota is, broadly speaking, determined by taking the number of valid votes cast in the electoral area and dividing them by the number of seats to be won plus one and then adding one to the result of that division. So, if an electoral area has 5 representatives the quota is determined by dividing the total number of valid votes by 6 (i.e. 5+1) and then adding one.

When the votes are first counted, the first preferences on all ballots are examined, and any candidate who received enough first preference votes to meet the quota will be declared elected. It often happens that some candidates have more first preference votes than the quota actually required for election. In that case, all votes which a candidate received in excess of the needed quota are declared surplus votes. But these votes are not disregarded; instead they are transferred to the candidate who was indicated on the ballot paper as the voter's next-ranked choice. Once these votes have been transferred, a second count will be made to determine whether any other candidate has now achieved the quota.

Additional counts will usually be necessary to determine the various winners in succession until all the available seats have been won. If on any count no candidate meets the quota, the candidate with the fewest number of votes is eliminated and his or her votes are transferred to the candidate who is the next-ranked choice on the ballot paper. (If a ballot paper no longer indicates a preference for a remaining candidate, then the vote becomes 'non-transferable' and remains unused.) These transfers of votes, from candidates who have either been elected or eliminated, continue through successive counts until all seats have been filled.

The most important features of the single transferable vote method are that (1) several candidates will be elected in each electoral area; (2) voters cast their votes for individual candidates in preferential order, not for a list of party candidates; and (3) voters may distribute their preferences among candidates of different parties or Independent candidates.

The system is used: for parliamentary elections in the Republic of Ireland and Malta, elections to the Australian Senate, and in Northern Ireland for Assembly, local government and European Parliamentary elections. STV has also recently been introduced as an option for local government elections in New Zealand.

5. The Alternative Vote (AV)

How the System Works:

The alternative vote (AV) offers a variation on FPTP. Under AV, representatives are elected from single member electoral areas but rather than marking a single 'X' against their one preferred candidate, each voter is asked to rank the candidates on the ballot paper in an order of preference, putting '1' next to their favourite, '2' by their second choice and so on. If a candidate receives a majority of first place votes, he or she would be elected. However if no single candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, the candidate with the fewest number of votes is eliminated and the votes redistributed to the next-ranked candidate on those ballot papers. The process is repeated until one candidate gets an absolute majority of the votes counted. The alternative vote is not considered to be a proportional system, but a majoritarian system.

The system is used: in the Australian House of Representatives.

6. The Supplementary Vote (SV)

How the System works:

The supplementary vote (SV), is another variation of a majoritarian system vote. SV is similar to the alternative vote except that voters are offered the option of indicating a second preference (only) among the candidates contesting the electoral area – which is single member. Voters are not required to make a second preference if they do not wish to do so. Usually, there are two columns on the ballot paper - one for the first preference and one for the second preference. Voters mark an 'X' in the first column for their first preference and a second 'X' in the second column for their other preference.

Voters' first preferences are counted and if one candidate gets 50% of the vote, that candidate is elected. If no candidate reaches 50% of the vote, the two highest scoring candidates are retained and the rest of the candidates are eliminated. The second preferences on the ballot papers of the eliminated candidates are examined and any that have been cast for the two remaining candidates are given to them. Whoever has the most votes at the end of the process wins.

The system is used: to elect the Mayor of London.

The Alternative Vote Plus (AV+)

How the System Works:

AV+ is a mixed system, similar to AMS, combining single-member electoral areas with party list additional members. Voters have two votes - one for their immediate single member electoral area and the other for a party list.

The representatives from the single member electoral areas are elected by the Alternative Vote (see above). The "additional" members are elected in the same way as the party list members under the Additional Member System (see above).

The system is not currently used anywhere in the world. It is the system proposed by the Independent Commission on the Voting System (chaired by Lord Jenkins of Hillhead) to be put to the electorate in a referendum as an alternative to First Past the Post for UK General Elections.