

Local Government and Public Services Committee

LGPS(2)-08-05(p.5)

Date: Wednesday 21 September 2005

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Committee's Scrutiny Project into Electoral Arrangements in Wales - Evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators Wales

Some Topics for Discussion and Questions – Electoral Services

Joint Working with Stakeholders

- AEA Wales welcomes the opportunity to build relationships and engage in ongoing discussions with all stakeholders to discuss issues regularly and in good time before legislation is introduced.
- We welcome therefore involvement in the Elections Working Party recently set up.
- AEA Wales itself acts as an important forum for improving good practice: by providing training for our members, by sharing innovative ideas on good practice and by acting as a single customer for such goods and services and postal services or election stationery.

The Work of Local Authority Electoral Services

- Electoral Registration – the corner stone of the democratic process. A good Register is one that concentrates not only on numbers but also on accuracy. We now have "rolling registration". The registers can be sold, both in a full and an edited version, to prescribed customers. The registration processes also encompass absent voters and special category electors, such as servicemen or overseas electors.
- Elections – are now held almost every year for the five tiers of government in Wales. Casual vacancies at local election level are always ongoing.
- Reviews of areas, boundaries and electoral arrangements – a role shared with the Boundary Commissions.

Key Areas of Current Debate

Registration

- Falling registration – the latest Electoral Commission research
- Has rolling registration worked?
- Moving towards individual registration – individual identifiers – electronic registration
- Anonymous registration for the vulnerable
- Facilitating registration closer to an election – say at P(olling)-11 days
- Enabling EROs to deal with clerical errors up to and on polling day
- Simplifying the objections process for registration
- The future role of an annual canvass
- The format of the canvass form and of the rolling registration application form
- Publicity for registration – shared publicity
- A national electronic register – produced locally- CORE
- Removing anomalies in the supply and use of the register

Absent Voting

- The aftermath of the Birmingham Case – the perception of fraud
- Workloads – electoral services coping and not managing
- Altering the application deadline to P-11 days
- Simplifying the application process – linking it to the registration process – using the same deadline
- Checking identifiers provided by the elector on his application
- ERO to acknowledge all postal voting applications

- Improving access to the absent voters lists
- Facilitate new production methods for postal ballots
- Simplifying the process of voting – a simple security statement – guidance on the secrecy of the vote – secrecy warnings
- Improved provisions for the issue of replacement postal votes up to 5 p.m. on polling day
- Postal votes must be returned to the RO or to central clearing
- Marked registers of postal votes received to be available
- New offences – fraudulently applying for a postal vote

Nominations at Elections

- Streamline the process
- Standard timetables for all elections
- Longer timetables for elections
- Alter age of candidacy from 21 to 18 for all elections

Elections

- Low turnout – low participation rates – lack of engagement
- Providing new, secure voting channels – internet, mobile phone, post, in addition to the traditional polling station – increasing choice
- Disabled access and polling stations
- Children accompanying adults at polling stations
- Powers for presiding officers to check voter Ids in the polling station
- Marked registers and their availability

- Approved observers to be allowed access to polling stations
- Improved security – Ids to be provided by voters – watermarks or security printing on ballot papers
- Improving powers of arrest for personation

Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers

- New funding arrangements – central funding
- Quality standards and clear accountability