

Meeting of:	COUNCIL
Date of Meeting:	13 MARCH 2024
Report Title:	SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Responsible Officer:	GARY ENNIS GROUP MANAGER BUSINESS SUPPORT
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council now has the option of changing the voting system from a ‘First Past the Post’ (FPtP) to a ‘Single Transferable Vote’ (STV) system. • FPtP is well understood by everybody but STV, whilst a more complex process, should provide more proportionate weighting to an individual’s vote. • Changing the voting system to STV would require a boundary review of all current County Borough wards to ensure there is a minimum of 3 councillors per ward and no more than 6 councillors per ward. • In STV, voters rank candidates in order of preference, marking a ‘1’ against their first preference, a ‘2’ against their second preference, and so on, for as many candidates as there are on the ballot paper if they wish to. • With STV, counting takes place in rounds with surplus votes from elected candidates and votes from eliminated candidates being transferred to the next preferred candidate until all seats have been filled. • Surplus votes are transferred at a much lower value and eliminated candidate votes are transferred at the value they were received. • The complexities involved mean counting can take at least 2 or 3 days to complete. • Council must decide if it wishes to go out to consultation before it can make a resolution at Council by the 15th

	<p>November 2024 to change the system which must then be used for at least the 2027 and 2032 local elections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation must be with every local government elector, Town and Community Councils and other key stakeholders.
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to allow Council to consider whether it wishes to consider changing the voting system for local elections to the Single Transferrable Vote (STV).

2. Background

- 2.1 Sections 8 and 9 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the 2021 Act”) allows local authorities in Wales to change their voting system. The current system uses a simple majority system commonly know as ‘first past the post,’ which the council will continue to use unless they resolve to change to a system know as the Single Transferable Vote. This option is not available to Town and Community Councils.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The STV is a form of proportional representation used in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Malta, Scotland, Estonia, and Australia for some of their elections. In the STV system, whilst it is far more complex should provide a more proportionate weighting to an individual’s vote. This complexity, however, makes it difficult to explain and may result in voter confusion.
- 3.2 In order for this to work there will need to be a full boundary review to create multi-member wards across the Authority. There must be a minimum of 3 councillors per ward and no more than 6. Bridgend currently has 28 wards with only 8 wards having 3 councillors. The maximum number of wards under STV would be 17 (17 X three councillor wards = 51 councillors) but it could be as few as 9 wards (e.g., 8 x six councillor wards and 1 x three councillor ward). The review of boundaries would fall under the remit of the Boundary Commission for Wales who would begin this once a decision to change has been ratified.
- 3.3 The current ‘First Past the Post’ system (FPTP) is well understood. Voters can cast as many votes as there are seats to be filled at the election; and every vote for a Candidate is counted once to tally up the votes for each candidate. The candidate(s) with the the most votes are elected.
- 3.4 In the STV system, voters can rank as many or as few candidates on the ballot paper as they wish. They do this by ranking candidates in order of preference i.e., voters would place ‘1’ next to their favourite candidate, ‘2’ next to their second favourite candidate and so on. To be elected, candidates must receive sufficient votes through a complicated count process where each candidate must receive a quota of votes to be elected. The quota is calculated based on the number of seats

and the number of valid votes cast.

- 3.5 Counting takes place in rounds with surplus votes from elected candidates and votes from eliminated candidates being transferred to the next preferred candidate until all seats have been filled. Surplus votes are the number of votes above the quota received by an elected candidate and are transferred at a much lower value per vote based on the number of surplus votes. After each round the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated and all their votes redistributed to the next preferred candidate based on the value of the vote when they received it.
- 3.6 With this process being incredibly complex, one of the key issues is ensuring that both elected members and members of the public can properly understand the system. There is evidence that the number of spoilt votes increases, and that the percentage of rejections increases with the number of candidates on the ballot paper.
- 3.7 Electronic counting would remove many of the complexities with the calculations required, but this has significant costs. There are, however, increased costs to administer a manual STV count process as it is a much longer process and experience in other areas of the UK where STV is used indicate that it is not unusual for counts to last 2-3 days as a minimum. Each additional day for the count would require additional hire of premises and count staff.
- 3.8 If the Council wishes to consider changing there will need to be a consultation with every local government elector in Bridgend (112,700) as well as other key stakeholders like Town and Community Councils etc. As a minimum, we could write out to each household (66,563) alongside a media campaign via social media etc. Council would then need to consider the results of the consultation and decide whether to adopt the STV system for the 2027 elections.
- 3.9 A decision to move to STV following the consultation must be taken at a meeting which is specifically held for that purpose (i.e. no other Council Business) and the agenda for the meeting must be published at least 21 days before the date of the meeting. The 2021 Act stipulates that the Council must make such a decision by the 15th of November in the year three years before the next ordinary election is due. Therefore, by the 15th of November 2024 the Council must pass a resolution that is supported by at least a 2/3rd majority of the total number of Members in full Council.
- 3.10 If the Councils opts to change to STV, the system must be used for the next two rounds of ordinary local elections (i.e., the 2027 and the 2032 elections) before the Council could consider changing back to the current First Past the Post system

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent implications from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Due to the complexities of the counting process for STV, the increase in costs to administer the count would be approximately £25k per additional day.

8.2 For consultation, the cost of a single letter to all households without providing any return envelope would be circa £25k but this would need to be supplemented by general consultation using social media and radio advertising as well as possible public meetings which will add anything up to circa £50k based on the media campaign undertaken for the early voting pilots.

8.3 There is no funding available in the budget for the consultation exercise and there will need to be additional allocation of budget for the election if the change to the voting system is made.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Council is asked to determine whether or not to go out to consultation with persons entitled to vote as electors at a local government election, Town and Community Councils and such other persons as the Council considers appropriate on the issue of adopting the Single Transferable Voting system at the 2027 local elections and the following local elections in 2032.

Background documents

None