

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COUNCIL

9 FEBRUARY 2022

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ADVANCE VOTING PILOT SCHEME AT LOCAL ELECTIONS MAY 2022

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to participate in the Advanced Voting pilots allowing voting at the Local Elections in May 2022 in certain Polling Stations on the Tuesday and Wednesday before Polling Day on Thursday 5th May 2022.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

- **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives

3. Background

- 3.1 A request for expressions of interest from Welsh Government was sent to all Welsh Local Authorities in July 2021 following the publication of a Statement by the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution, which included the opportunity to develop advance voting pilots.
- 3.2 Following consultation with group leaders, the Returning Officer informed Welsh Government of Bridgend's interest in establishing an advance voting pilot to open polling stations in specific wards on the Tuesday and Wednesday before polling day including a separate pilot within a school solely for eligible pupils in that school.
- 3.3 Regular meetings have and continue to be held between officers, Welsh Government and software providers to ensure the pilots are both lawful and viable. There is a high degree of confidence that everything is or will be in place to deliver a successful pilot.
- 3.4 A decision is now required on whether Bridgend County Borough Council will now proceed with the advance voting pilot.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The wards chosen for the advance voting pilot are listed below, with their new names from May 2022, with the current wards shown in brackets: -

- Brackla East and Coychurch Lower [Brackla, Coychurch Lower]
- Brackla East Central [Brackla]
- Brackla West [Brackla]
- Brackla West Central [Brackla]
- Cornelly [Cornelly]
- Pyle, Kenfig Hill and Cefn Cribwr [Pyle, Cefn Cribwr]
- St Bride's Minor and Ynysawdre [Bryncethin, Bryncoch, Sarn and Ynysawdre]

4.2 The initial selection of the pilot wards was based on the turnout rates at the Local Elections in 2017 which identified 5 wards both ranked with the overall lowest turnout rates and the lowest turnout rates at polling stations. The table below shows the turnout and ranking: -

Electoral Division	Overall Turnout	Rank	Turnout at Polling Station	Rank
Bryncethin	30.65%	1	26.32%	3
Pyle	31.03%	2	25.24%	1
Bryncoch	31.84%	3	28.08%	5
Sarn	32.74%	4	25.89%	2
Brackla	34.02%	5	28.00%	4

- 4.3 There are three additional wards from the Local Elections in 2017 that have been added to the pilot due to the implementation of the Boundary Commission review which has combined them with existing wards identified for the pilot. These wards are Cefn Cribwr, Coychurch Lower and Ynysawdre.
- 4.4 Separately, because Cynffig Comprehensive school was a separate pilot within a school solely for eligible pupils in that school, the ward of Cornelly was added to the advanced voting pilot as the catchment area for Cynffig Comprehensive is almost entirely within the Pyle, Cefn Cribwr, and Cornelly boundaries and the majority of the pupils eligible to vote would be included.
- 4.5 There will be 20 polling stations open from 7am to 9pm across the seven advanced pilot wards on the Tuesday and Wednesday, giving the electorate a choice of 3 days to cast their votes. In Cynffig Comprehensive, there will be 2 polling stations open on the Tuesday from 8.30am to 4.30pm solely for the purpose of the 16+ registered students. This will allow them to vote in an environment they are comfortable with and to encourage forming the habit of voting, although they can choose to vote in one of the pilot ward polling stations if they wish.
- 4.6 These pilot wards represent approximately 27% of the Bridgend County Borough Council and provide a solid foundation to run the pilots and assess whether having polling stations open for the two days prior to polling day improves overall turnout rates when compared to the turnout rates in the other wards.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no direct effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. An Equality Impact screening assessment has been undertaken in the production of this report and identified that there are no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 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.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 All additional costs incurred in running the Advanced Voting Pilots will be funded in full via a Grant from the Welsh Government.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Council approve participation in the Advance Voting pilot as set out in this report.

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Background documents: None