

Minutes



Liaison Meeting with Community Councils

Date: 14 March 2024

Time: 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bishton, Graig, Llanwern, Penhow, Rogerstone and Wentlooge

In Attendance: Leanne Rowlands- (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Simon Richards (Governance Officer) and Taylor Strange (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

Cath Davies (Marshfield CC) and Julie Foster (Wentlooge CC)

2 Declarations of Interest

None

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes from the previous meeting held **7th December 2023** were **agreed as a true and accurate record.**

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee of the Forward Work Programme and confirmed that the final Independent Remuneration Report has been published here <https://www.gov.wales/independent-remuneration-panel-wales-annual-report-2024-2025-html>

4 One Voice Wales

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that the One Voice Wales Representative was unable to attend so this item will be moved to the next meeting.

5 Community Council Charter Review

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that the Community Council Charter Review was shared to members following the last meeting for any changes to be made. None were received so the date has been amended to the review date and a copy will be shared as part of the minutes.

6 Absent Votes

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager presented this item to the Committee.

Key Points:

- Elections Act 2022 has made changes to how we apply to vote by post and proxy in some elections in Wales.
- Voter ID went live in January 2023 and the first time this will be used in Wales is in May 2024 for the upcoming PCC Elections.
- Absent Voting includes Postal, Proxy and Overseas Voting.
- If you are unable to vote in person, you can ask someone to vote on your behalf. This is called a proxy vote. You can only apply for a proxy vote under certain circumstances including being away on polling day, being registered as an overseas voter, having a medical issue or disability or not being able to vote in person because of work or military service. Your proxy should be someone you trust to vote on your behalf, and you'll need to tell them which candidate you want to vote for.
- Since the 31st October 2023, electors can apply for most types of absent vote online. Electors can apply for the following absent votes both online and via a paper application: Postal vote, Proxy vote for a particular election or referendum and Proxy application for definite or indefinite period for overseas and service electors.
- All absent vote application made on or after the 31st October 2023 must contain a National Insurance Number or a reason why one cannot be provided. The personal identifiers contained on the application must initially be verified against the Department of Works and Pension (DWP) data. Where an application fails to match with DWP data, electors will be required to provide documentary evidence to verify their identity. Where this is not possible, electors must submit an attestation to confirm their identity.
- From 31st October 2023 a person is not entitled to vote as proxy in any electoral area on behalf of more than four electors. No more than two of these electors can be domestic electors. Domestic electors are those electors who are neither service voters nor overseas electors.
- From 31st October 2023, a postal vote can be in place for a particular poll, a definite period of not more than 3 years or a maximum period of up to 3 years. Electors applying for a postal vote from 31st October 2023 onwards will only be able to hold their postal vote until the third 31st January following the date on which their application was granted.
- For electors with a long-term postal vote in place before the 31st October 2023 there will be transitional arrangements. Existing domestic electors will be able to vote by post for relevant polls until 31st January 2026. Proxy voters can continue to put in place a proxy arrangement for an indefinite period, but this will be subject to a three-year eligibility check and a five-year signature refresh. However, all existing proxy voters who have an arrangement in place before 31st October 2023 must reapply and make a fresh application by the 31st January 2024.
- Postal votes are sometimes handed into polling stations or to the Civic Centre. Each person handing in postal votes in this way will now be required to complete a form to be submitted with the postal vote. Without this form being completed, the vote will not be counted.
- If you are a British or eligible Irish citizen living overseas who has previously lived in the UK or been registered to vote in the UK, you can register to vote in UK Parliamentary elections. A number of changes to voting from overseas now apply:
 - You can register to vote if you previously lived in the UK but were not registered to vote.
 - You can register to vote in the UK no matter how long ago you left or were last registered to vote.
 - Your overseas declaration is now valid for three years, lasting until 1st November in the third year after it takes effect.

- You can now register online.
- If you are an overseas voter who registered to vote before 16th January 2024, you will need to renew your registration when your declaration expires. If you applied for a proxy vote before 31st October 2023, this would expire on 31st January 2024, and you will need to reapply for a proxy vote. If you have a long-term postal vote that you applied for before 31st October 2023, this will now expire on 31st January 2026. The electoral services team at your local council will contact you before your postal vote expires.

Discussion Points:

- A Community Councillor noted that the online portal is not applicable for local elections and paper application forms must be completed for these. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that this is correct and stated that it is important to make sure residents know what they are applying for and there has been information included in the reminder letters being issued to residents this year.
- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that if an application does not meet the criteria, the voter will be contacted to ask for additional information and the challenge is that as you get closer to the polling date, the amount of applications received increase and the cut-off could be breached.
- A Community Councillor stated that this could be a potential issue with postal voting if you are abroad. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that ballot papers for postal voting are sent out as early as possible both locally and overseas.
- A Community Councillor enquired whether residents who are registered for long-term postal voting would need to be renewed for this election. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that residents will be contacted over the next three years so that the workload is staggered.
- A Community Councillor enquired whether overseas voters are contacted. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that as there is no register, it is difficult to contact overseas voters. They informed the Committee that applications have been received and electors can vote online but there is a challenge to try and find out whether they previously lived in the UK.
- A Community Councillor asked how groups could contact Electoral Services if they wanted further information or someone to come out to discuss voter engagement. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that they can use uvote@newport.gov.uk or democratic.services@newport.gov.uk.
- A Community Councillor enquired when the polling cards will be sent out for the upcoming PCC elections in May. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that these are usually sent out in the second week of April in unison with the other Local Authorities in Gwent.

7 Forward Work Programme

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that a Personal Safety training session is due to be held in May. A Community Councillor asked whether there is scope for additional sessions for Community Councillors with disabilities or additional needs. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that they could enquire whether this is possible.
- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager asked the Committee for Agenda items that can be considered in the Forward Work Programme.
- A Community Councillor enquired whether future budget proposals would have an impact on Community Council service provision. The Democratic and Electoral

Services Manager informed the Committee that any changes that would take place would need to go through a consultation process.

8 Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 4th July.