

Giving more people a say in local democracy

They reflect last year's Welsh Government consultation on reforming the electoral system in Wales, which received almost 1000 responses.

Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies, said:

"Local democracy is all about participation. We want to boost the numbers registered as electors, make it easier for people to cast their votes, and give more people the right to take part."

Under the proposals to be announced this week, 16 and 17 year olds would be given the right to vote in council elections, along with all foreign nationals legally resident in Wales. Automatic registration would help ensure fewer people were missed from the electoral register.

Alun Davies said he wants councils to pilot innovative new voting methods, which reflect people's busy lives. These could include remote digital voting, mobile polling stations and voting at places like supermarkets, local libraries, leisure centres and railway stations.

To ensure that people have a clear choice, councils would have to post policy statements from the candidates on line and all those standing would have to declare any party affiliation. Voters will know what candidates stand for and have more reason to vote.

Alun Davies said:

"I am concerned we are still seeing far too many people, particularly young people, disengaged from the political process.

"There are many reasons for this but we must do more to make the process more attractive, welcoming and transparent. The proposals we're announcing this week will, we hope, help increase participation and improve the democratic process for everyone in Wales.

"I would like to see authorities in Wales take the lead and pilot a number of innovative voting methods, something put on hold at the UK level since the mid-2000s. I want to see whether, for example electronic voting or counting, voting on more than one day and in places other than traditional polling stations, could boost participation rates and improve the overall experience for Welsh voters."

Jessica Blair, Director of the Electoral Reform Society Cymru said:

“We are delighted to see the Welsh Government bringing forward these innovative ideas to modernise our democracy. It is an opportunity for Wales to lead the way in creating a political system that works for everybody and it is particularly pertinent as we recognise the centenary of the first women getting the vote.

“Last year our Missing Voices project, in which we talked about politics and voting with nearly 1,000 people across Wales, revealed an appetite for doing things differently. We believe these recommendations are the first step in making that happen.”

[UK and Welsh governments agree new Welsh taxes ready to go](#)

From 1 April 2018 Stamp Duty Land Tax and Landfill Tax will be replaced by Land Transaction Tax and Landfill Disposals Tax in Wales.

At a meeting in Cardiff today the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss, and Welsh Government Finance Secretary, Professor Mark Drakeford, agreed that, following an assessment of the Joint Exchequer Committee (Officials) on 10 January, the Welsh Government, Welsh Revenue Authority and HMRC are ready for the transition to the new devolved taxes.

Professor Drakeford said:

“The devolution of these taxes represents a significant milestone for Wales, helping us to make Wales a fairer nation and to grow the Welsh economy.

“Today’s meeting was also an opportunity to reflect on the good and constructive relationships which have developed in taking fiscal devolution forward over this period. I look forward to this continuing.”

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss, said:

“We are committed to giving the National Assembly for Wales more responsibility to raise its own funding and that is why further income tax powers will follow next year. This will give the Welsh Government greater powers to shape their economy.

“The UK government is also committed to delivering for Wales, as demonstrated by the £1.2bn boost to the Welsh Government’s funding at Budget. I look forward to continuing our constructive working partnership.”

Support announced for Ystalyfera landslip

Following a series of landslides in Pantteg, the local authority approached the Welsh Government for financial assistance to help them deal with managing the effects.

The council has been working hard to protect lives and property, and to manage and mitigate the ongoing risk. The Welsh Government recognises the associated costs are substantial and above what the authority could have reasonably planned for and has agreed to provide some additional financial support.

The grant offered this week will support the range of costs incurred including making the area safe, supporting the affected community, analysing and mitigating the potential for further landslips.

Alun Davies said:

“It’s clear that the challenges the council face in dealing with the incident are unique, and the costs incurred are higher than any budgets could reasonably anticipate.

“This grant will help the local authority continue to protect lives and property as well as support it to address the longer term resilience and sustainability of the area.”

A warm welcome home to Team Wales

The ‘Welcome Home’ event was held at the Norwegian Church in Cardiff to celebrate the triumphant return of the four Welsh competitors who represented the UK at WorldSkills; the world’s largest skills competition, hosted in Abu Dhabi.

Having excelled on a national level at Skills Competition Wales and the WorldSkills UK finals, these young competitors represented the nation as part of Team UK, competing against the most highly skilled young people from 77 different countries across the globe.

The event recognised the incredible talent of the four competitors: Joseph Massey, 23, from Coleg Cambria, who competed in the Aeronautical Engineering category, Alfie Hopkin, 18, Llanelli, who competed in the Web Design category, Elizabeth Forkuoh, 20, from Llanelli, who competed in the Restaurant Service competition, and Ethan Davies, 21, from Mynydd Isa who competed in the CNC Milling competition.

Recognition was also given to their families, colleges and employers for supporting the competitors at every stage throughout their journeys to success.

Eluned Morgan, Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, said: "I'm proud to welcome home these talented Welsh youngsters and celebrate their achievements as representatives of the nation. Elizabeth, Alfie, Joseph and Ethan are a credit both to Wales and their industries.

"The return of these young people to Wales highlights the importance of nurturing and supporting skilled people in Wales, for the benefit of the Welsh economy. Events like these showcase the talent that Wales and Welsh industries have to offer.

"These world-class individuals serve as an inspiration to Wales and demonstrate how we are a nation of high industry standards with a highly skilled workforce. We hope these success stories will serve as inspiration to other individuals to follow their examples and become experts in their fields."

Backed by the Welsh Government through the European Social Fund, these competitions promote the importance of developing a highly skilled workforce and world-class individuals.

For more information visit www.worldskillswales.org

Kirsty Williams visits north Wales to open two 21 Century Schools

Ysgol Nant y Groes and Ysgol Swyn y Don have been refurbished and extended to provide state-of-the-art teaching environments, with all the facilities expected in a 21st Century School, including the latest in IT equipment.

The overall cost of these two projects was £4.2 million, funded by Welsh

Government 21st Century Schools and Education Programme (50%) and Conwy County Borough Council Education Capital Programme (50%).

During her visits, the Education Secretary toured both sites to see their newly improved facilities and enjoyed performances by pupils, before unveiling plaques in front of the gathered guests.

Kirsty Williams said:

“It is a pleasure to be in Conwy today to officially open the newly refurbished Ysgol Nant y Groes and Ysgol Swn y Don, and see first-hand how the Welsh Government’s investment is having a positive impact on education and learning in the area.

“Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. Our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme plays a key part in this and is the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.”

The new Ysgol Nant y Groes is the amalgamation of infants school Ysgol Glan y Môr and junior school Ysgol Pendorlan, which were housed in separate buildings on the same site in Colwyn Bay.

This £2.25 million investment project focussed on improving the school environment through refurbishment of the existing site in addition to developing a physical link connecting the two existing buildings.

In addition to the single storey glazed link area, internal improvements have included room remodelling and construction of a new platform lift and lift shaft, providing access for all pupils to the second storey KS2 area.

Alterations and extensions have also been made to all internal and external services including much needed boiler replacement and improved IT facilities.

Externally, investment has improved playground areas and school frontage, providing playground equipment, and a new 3G MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) facility.

The Ysgol Swn y Don project involved the amalgamation of the existing infants and junior schools, Ysgol Babanod Penmaenrhos and Ysgol Iau Tan y Marian, with a new Primary School established on the Ysgol Tan y Marian site.

As part of this £1.97million refurbishment, the building has been extensively renovated, with a new school entrance and reception, extension of two new classrooms (nursery and reception), a redecoration throughout, renovation of the school kitchen, and new electronic whiteboards for each classroom and the hall.

A soft play area for Nursery and Reception Classes has also been established, and a new boiler and heating system installed. The school has also benefited

from an extended tarmac play area, nature trail, benches, garden sheds and flower beds.

Leader, Conwy County Borough Council, Councillor Gareth Jones added:

“It’s very important to the Council that we are able to invest in our schools, to allow the governors and staff to provide high quality education and support in buildings that are fit for purpose. I wish the staff and pupils of Ysgol Nant y Groes and Ysgol Swyn y Don all the very best, and I thank the Cabinet Secretary for taking the time to visit both schools today.”