



COUNCIL – 26TH JANUARY 2022

**SUBJECT: ADVANCED VOTING CENTRE PILOT – LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ELECTION MAY 2022**

REPORT BY: RETURNING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to participate in the advanced electoral pilots driven by Welsh Government in the forthcoming Local Government and Community Council elections. Advance voting to be held on Saturday 30 April 2022 and Sunday 1 May 2022. This is in addition to the election taking place on Thursday 5th May 20122

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution published a statement in July 2021 setting out an agenda for electoral change. This included lowering the voting age to 16 for local government elections, extending the franchise to all foreign citizens and the opportunity to develop advance voting pilots.
- 2.2 Welsh Government wrote to all authorities in Wales asking for expressions of interest from any authority wishing to participate in an electoral pilot. Following consultation with group leaders the Returning Officer informed Welsh Government of Caerphilly's interest in establishing an advance voting centre at Ty Penallta on the weekend before the ordinary day of poll.
- 2.3 Regular meetings have been held between the Electoral Services Manager, Welsh Government and software providers to ensure the pilots are both lawful and viable. The level of confidence that everything necessary will be in place to allow the pilot to take place is high although there are still some changes outstanding from our software suppliers. A decision is now required on whether we as an authority will now proceed (subject to the final software changes being completed in a timely manner).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the advance voting pilot take place at Penallta House on Saturday 30th April and Sunday 1st May subject to the necessary IT systems being in place.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Providing an advanced voting centre will make both the county borough and community council elections in May 2022 as accessible as possible. It will ensure that everyone who wants to vote, can vote, and offers a wider choice to residents and may be particularly welcomed by anyone not registered for an absent vote who may otherwise struggle to visit their polling station on Election Day.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Welsh Government set out plans in advance of the May 2022 elections to increase the number of people registered to vote and to introduce new flexible voting schemes to enable advanced voting and encourage voter participation.

- 5.2 Caerphilly is one of four authorities chosen to run a pilot in Wales having submitted expressions of interest. The others are Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend and Torfaen.

- 5.3 It is intended that Ty Penallta be used as an advance voting centre on Saturday the 30th April and Sunday 1st May prior to Election Day on Thursday 5th May 2022. It is intended that the opening hours for the advance voting centre will be 10am to 4pm.

- 5.4 Ty Penallta is central to the County Borough and offers opportunity for all residents to vote in advance of the main election on 5th May 2022. It is recognised that electors may not wish or be able to travel to Ty Penallta but it was considered the most suitable venue for a pilot. All electors can still apply for a postal or proxy vote or attend their local polling station on Thursday 5th May.

- 5.5 Should any eligible residents in the county wish to cast their vote in advance, they will be able to do so from this central location, in both the local and community council elections.

- 5.6 The administration of the Advanced Voting Centre will be undertaken in the same stringent manner that all elections in the county borough are undertaken and the integrity of the process maintained to ensure all stakeholders can have confidence in the process. A robust planning process will ensure the pilot will be open to scrutiny in the normal manner and delivered lawfully.

5.7 Conclusion

Approval of this report will allow the Returning Officer to implement advance voting for residents at the election in May, 2022.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions in this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An assessment has not been completed for this report as the statutory responsibility for running elections sits as a personal responsibility of the Returning Officer.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 All costs associated with participating in the pilot will be met by Welsh Government.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 All responses have been incorporated into the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Functions and Responsibilities) (Wales) Regulations 2007 (legislation.gov.uk) determines that decision to undertake an electoral pilot cannot be made by the executive and needs to be a decision of the full council.

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Background Papers:

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Functions and Responsibilities) (Wales) Regulations 2007