

**POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD**

**4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2008**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

**ADDENDUM REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY  
P.GRAHAM**

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**ITEM NO.1**  
**PART 1 – SECTION A**

**1** **ELECTION DAY – WEEKEND VOTING**  
**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE CONSULTATION**

**1.1** **Purpose of the Report**

To obtain the Board's views on the Ministry of Justice consultation paper seeking comments on whether voting would be more convenient by changing the timing of Election Day and whether there are other steps that could be taken to make it easier for people to cast their vote. The closing date for comments is 26<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

**1.2** **Background**

One of the goals of HM Government's "Governance of Britain" programme is to invigorate democracy and give citizens the means to participate in decision making at every level. As part of this the Government is exploring the barriers that currently exist to voting and how these can be overcome. This consultation paper focuses on the physical barriers to voting on Election Day.

One of the Government's aims is that people should be able to exercise their right to vote with ease and without unnecessary barriers. The objective is to ensure voting processes are accessible, convenient and easy to use without compromising security. So, in addition to seeking views of the timing of Election Day, the Government is also seeking views on the following forms of advance voting and whether these would be acceptable alternatives to election days being held on a Thursday or may usefully support election days at the weekend:

- Advance voting at polling stations; and
- The use of advance and remote voting over the telephone/internet.

**1.3** **Specific Consultation Issues**

The consultation paper makes no specific proposals but rather highlights the pros and cons relating to the following issues in relation to the timing of Election Day:

- Pertinent issues, including religious concerns;
- Whether moving Election Day would impact on the security of elections;
- The relationship between absent voting and election day;
- To what extent other mechanisms for voting, such as remote voting, would be acceptable alternatives to those for whom weekend voting would be difficult;
- The benefits and drawbacks of remote e-voting;
- Would any of the possible changes incentivise non-voters to vote;
- Whether any potential additional costs outweigh any potential benefits.

The consultation paper outlines the historical basis of Election Day traditionally being a Thursday – there are no legal reasons why it must be – and quotes findings from various research projects into the impact on turn-out of holding elections on days other than Thursday or of introducing new electronic forms of voting. The research suggests that there is little impact, or where there is an impact, it is not necessarily solely due to such changes.

The full consultation paper can be accessed at:  
[www.justice.gov.uk/publications/cp1308.htm](http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/cp1308.htm)

#### **1.4 Proposed Response**

The consultation paper includes a questionnaire setting out all of the issues being consulted upon. A draft completed questionnaire is attached at Appendix 1.

#### **1.5 Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Draft Response

## **1.6 Recommendation**

It is recommended that, subject to any additional views agreed by Members, that the response set out in Appendix 1 be submitted to the Ministry of Justice.

## **1.7 Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To respond to the Ministry of Justice Consultation Paper by the due deadline of 26<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

## **1.8 Reason for Urgency**

To ensure that members' views obtained and included in the Council's response to the Ministry of Justice by the 26<sup>th</sup> September deadline.

## **1.9 List of Background Papers:**

Ministry of Justice Consultation Paper – Weekend Voting

## **1.10 Wards Affected:**

All

## **1.11 Valleys Strategy:**

All

## **1.11 Officer Contact:**

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## COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

### 1 **ELECTION DAY – WEEKEND VOTING** **MINISTRY OF JUSTICE CONSULTATION**

#### (a) **Implementation of Decision:**

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call-in period.

#### (b) **Sustainability Appraisal:**

##### **Community Plan Impacts**

Economic Prosperity	-	no impact
Education & Lifelong Learning	-	no impact
Better Health & Well Being	-	no impact
Environment & Transport	-	no impact
Crime & Disorder	-	no impact

##### **Other Impacts**

Welsh Language	-	no impact
Sustainable Development	-	no impact
Equalities	-	positive impacts
Social Inclusion	-	positive impacts

#### (c) **Consultation**

There has been no requirement under the constitution for external consultation on this item.



# Ministry of JUSTICE

## The Governance of Britain

### Election Day – weekend voting consultation [CP 13/08]

## List of questions for response

We would welcome responses to the following questions set out in this consultation paper.

Please email your completed form to: [weekendvotingconsultation@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:weekendvotingconsultation@justice.gsi.gov.uk) or fax to: **020 7210 2659**.

**Thank you!**

1. Do you think that polling day should be:

- a weekday
- a Saturday
- a Sunday, or
- take place over both Saturday and Sunday?

Please tell us why.

Comments: In our opinion we believe that polling day should remain as a weekday. There is no clear evidence to suggest that weekend voting would increase electorate turnout to a level which would justify the additional logistical and organisational complexities placed on electoral administrators, or the increased financial burden placed on the taxpayer, particularly in these economically precarious times.

The additional estimated costs required to stage weekend elections (£38-58 million) would have to demonstrate to the electorate value for money. As such, weekend voting piloting schemes must be undertaken on a wide scale and for various election types before any sort of nationwide roll-out programme could be considered. Whilst cost should not be the overriding factor in the determination of polling day(s), it does need serious consideration, especially as local government elections are funded by local authorities whose budgets are already extremely stretched.

Furthermore, While it could be argued that weekend voting used in certain other countries may produce slightly higher turn-out figures than weekday voting, this comparison may be distorted due to the additional provision of compulsory voting.

2. Who would be affected by changing the voting day to a weekend and how?

Comments: The following people/groups would be affected by the change:

- Religious Groups - As both Saturday and Sunday are days of religious observance, it would be difficult to choose a polling day giving preference to one day over another resulting in an election potentially being held over a two-day period. This would inevitably substantially increase costs, place a strain on limited resources and raise serious questions over election security and integrity issues.
- Election Staff - The moving of polling day to the weekend would have a detrimental effect on the recruitment of polling station and counting staff, particularly if the vote has to take place on both Saturday and Sunday.
- Polling Station Custodians - As church halls and chapel vestrys are a primary source of polling stations, the custodians of the buildings may not be able or willing to allow use of their buildings on a weekend due to religious services and other events.
- Rural Voters - With a limited weekend transport infrastructure within some rural communities, thought would have to be given to how weekend voting would affect these voters and their access to polling stations.
- Students - as many students work weekends so that their jobs do not interfere with their studies, the possibility of weekend voting could further decrease their participation in the democratic process.

3. Do you think that greater access to advance voting in polling stations should be made available alongside weekend voting? Please explain why.

Comments: We would agree that advance voting could benefit certain groups of electors, however from reading the pilot evaluation reports prepared by other local authorities who have already trialled this method, it is clear that it has only had a marginal effect on increasing voter turnout.

Furthermore, due to the substantial administrative and logistical burdens advanced voting coupled with weekend voting would inevitably place on electoral administrators we would be wholly opposed to this type of combination as it could significantly effect the integrity of the electoral process as well as diluting the importance of the traditional polling day.

4. Do you think that greater access to remote voting (whether through traditional postal voting or by electronic means) should be made available alongside weekend voting? Should such arrangements be explored even if polling day were not moved to the weekend? Please explain why.

Comments:

Offering electors greater access to remote voting whether through postal voting or by electronic means should be the primary focus of the Government. It is remote voting methods such as postal voting that hold the greatest benefit to electors and have consistently provided significant increases in electorate turnout figures ever since the introduction of postal voting on demand in 2000.

5. What do you perceive to be the benefits and the drawbacks of remote e-voting?

Comments: I perceive a number of benefits and drawbacks to remote e-voting, these are:

- Benefits:
- Potential for increased turnout - traditional postal voting and internet/mobile phone voting could help raise electoral participation levels even further and appeal to a wider cross-section of society.
- Easier for people to vote when they want - either via internet access or postal system, also beneficial for people who may be house-bound or elderly.
- The introduction of e-voting could appeal to younger voters who are comfortable with utilising new technology.
- Drawbacks:
- Security - When utilising internet or mobile phone technology it is essential that such systems of voting remain robust, transparent and highly secure.
- Cost - Introducing any new form of remote voting based on new technology can be prohibitively expensive and prone to technical glitches.
- Public perception - how the public perceive voting methods and their fairness is imperative to the success of any new voting system. Previous pilot schemes which have used e-voting technology have shown that such systems are still in their infancy and will require further time for development as confirmed by the Electoral Commission in their recent reports on this issue.



6. Should the government pilot weekend voting before introducing it across the UK?

Comments:

Due to the increased financial costs which would be incurred in introducing weekend voting it would seem prudent to allow a piloting programme to be undertaken in order to try and assess the benefits of the change to the electorate, and evaluate whether any increase in turnout could justify the financial outlay involved.

7. What other issues may arise if the polling day is moved to the weekend? What are the issues for:

- resources?
- polling station venues?
- security?
- administration of the election?

Comments:

Staff and Resources - It would be difficult to recruit staff for weekend election work without a significant increase in the payment for their election duties. Furthermore, if polling occurred on Saturday and Sunday, this would place considerable strain on the Returning Officer's core staff and stretch resource allocation beyond current limits.

Polling Station Venues - Polling stations such as church halls and chapel vestrys are in use on the weekend and there could be significant difficulties in booking these venues.

Security - Votes cast would have to be held at a secure location overnight ( if both Saturday and Sunday were utilised as polling days). This would cause logistical problems with regards to transporting ballot boxes and introduce an additional layer of unnecessary risk into the election process.

Administration of the Election - Moving polling day to the weekend would inevitably place additional and unnecessary logistical and administrative burdens on Returning Officers and Electoral Services Managers. Such burdens would be justifiable if electorate turnout rates were significantly increased due to such a change, however, on current evidence this would seem highly unlikely and further evidence on such a fundamental change to the electoral system needs to be subject to a pilot programme before proceeding further.

8. If weekend voting is introduced for local government elections, do you agree that the normal time for holding these elections should be moved from the first Thursday in May to the second weekend in May?

If not, please explain which weekend you believe it would be most appropriate for these elections to be held and why.

Comments:

If weekend voting was introduced for local government elections following a comprehensive piloting programme which produced evidence of significant increases in turnout, we would agree that the normal time for holding these elections should be moved from the first Thursday in May to the second weekend in May.

9. Are you aware of any barriers which prevent individuals from voting? What are the issues and how can they be overcome?

Comments:

We are aware of no significant barriers that prevent individuals from voting either via absent voting facilities or at their local polling station.