# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Launch of Electoral Reform Support Grant** |
| **DATE** | **03 February 2019** |
| **BY** | **Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government** |

In November last year I introduced *the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill*. Amongst the many provisions of the Bill are changes to the electoral system for local

elections that are intended to improve voter registration and democratic engagement.

This is an exciting time for elections in Wales, the recent *Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020* lowered the voting age to 16 and extended the franchise to qualifying foreign citizens for Senedd election. The *Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill* intends to do the same for local elections. Recently the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government brought before you the *The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2020* which are designed to modernise electoral registration and improve the voter experience. This suite of electoral reforms has the purpose of modernising practices, making them more efficient and most importantly improving voter experience.

To achieve these significant reforms it is essential that we work closely with all sector partners in Wales, but particularly with Electoral Services teams within every local authority. While I have no doubt the changes we are introducing will improve the voter experience there are implications for those managing the processes within local government. None of these reforms could be achieved without the continued hard work and dedication of the elections teams across all 22 authorities.

The Welsh Government, through its support of the *Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020* has already committed to meeting the costs of essential changes to electoral management software systems that have been incurred as a result of the franchise changes. Similarly, we have agreed to meet the costs of changes to registration forms incurred by the Electoral Commission.

In addition to this I, along with the Minister for Education, have committed £800,000 to supporting new and existing voters in understanding their democratic rights and engaging with the democratic processes. This work will include developing resources for use with young people in schools, and outside of the school setting; and a specific communication campaign to encourage newly enfranchised voters to register and take part in the 2021 Senedd elections and the 2022 local government elections.

We also want to recognise and support the essential work of electoral teams within local authorities, and that is why I am announcing today the *Electoral Reform Support Grant*.

This grant will be made available to all local authority Electoral Services teams to support their work in implementing recent, and forthcoming, electoral reform. A revenue grant of £100,000 will be made available to every Electoral Services team over 2 years. The first payment of £50,000 will be made in the current financial year 2019/20. The second payment of £50,000 will be made in the 2020/2021 financial year.

The aim of the grant is to assist electoral teams with the pressures associated with the extension of the franchise, canvass reform and other Welsh electoral reforms and in particular to support local authorities with registering newly enfranchised individuals. The terms of the grant will be flexible, with electoral teams able to use it in the most appropriate way for their local authority, provided the spend relates to the electoral reform programme. Such activity could include:

* registration drives for newly enfranchised groups;
* public awareness campaigns targeting under-represented groups;
* exploring accessibility issues when voting; or
* exploring local data matching to improve the completeness of the register.

My officials will be working closely with local government on the coming weeks to ensure grant offer letters are issued in good time and payments are made to every authority before the end of this financial year.