Voting and Digital Inclusion

Written by Stuart McKenzie
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If it is determined that the public should be involved in the election of the Legislative Council then the opportunity to move to on line voting should be seized. It is a stated objective of Tynwald that the future should include more use of IT facilities to enhance communication and lower cost. Of course not everybody is either willing or capable of using a computer for voting so any introduction must cater for what is assuredly now a minority in the Island.   There are many well developed on-line voting systems available and the wheel has very much been invented so it would be the task of ITD to select the best after detailed and destructive security testing. There would be a natural leaning towards the London based Electoral Reform Society but their prominent position attracts very significant fees and there are several other systems with equally strong experience and high security. For example examine the facilities available in the   BigP ulse.com application which cover the dissemination of manifestos, postal voting STV etc. The cost for 50,000 electors (current 48000+ say 2000 commissioners et al missed off) is only £7,000 for all elections held within 12 months.

Inevitably we would encounter problems but this is an excellent platform to create solutions leading perhaps to the adoption of similar voting opportunities for the Keys in the future.   The substantial cost of bye elections, much less a general election, is one area where a substantially reduced cost would be very welcome.

I would be inclined to limit manifestos to a picture and up to two A4 pages of text and to deliver sufficient paper copies to every library and local authority offices on the Island so that those without access to the internet would not be particularly affected.

In respect of digital inclusion I suggest that free awareness classes along the same lines as those provided by the DTI when the internet was in its infancy on the Island should be provided. These were very successful and undoubtedly contributed to the digital take up by non business people. The classes could cover all elements of the on line voting process and familiarise those attending with the process.

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It has been shown that the introduction of this revised electoral process has significantly increased turn out and involvement of the electorate – a spin off result to be welcomed.