

FINLÀNDIA

The Finnish Local Government Act

Chapter 4 Local residents' right of participation

Section 26 Suffrage and voting rights

In municipal elections held in a local authority, all citizens of Finland, other European Union Member States, Iceland and Norway who reach the age of 18 on the election date at the latest, and whose domicile as referred to in the Act on Domicile is that local authority according to the data in the population data system at the end of the 51st day before the election, shall have suffrage. Other foreigners fulfilling these preconditions also have suffrage in municipal elections if they have been domiciled in Finland for two years at that date.

(22.12.1995/1647)

In consultative referenda held in a local authority, citizens of Finland, other European Union Member States, Iceland and Norway who reach the age of 18 on the referendum date at the latest and whose domicile as referred to in the Act on Domicile is that local authority according to the data in the population data system at the end of the 51st day before the election, shall have suffrage. Other foreigners fulfilling these preconditions also have voting rights in a municipal referendum if they have been domiciled in Finland for two years at that date. (22.12.1995/1647)

Voting rights in a referendum concerning a component area of a local authority can only be exercised by persons living in that area.

Section 27 Opportunities to participate and exert influence

The council shall ensure that local residents and service users have opportunities to participate in and influence their local authority's operations.

Specifically, participation and influence can be furthered:

- 1) by electing representatives of service users to municipal organs;
- 2) by setting up administrations for component areas of a local authority;
- 3) by providing information about local affairs and holding hearings;
- 4) by finding out residents' opinions before taking decisions;
- 5) by providing for cooperation in managing the local authority's functions;
- 6) by helping residents to manage, prepare and plan matters on their own initiative; and
- 7) by arranging municipal referenda.

Section 28

Right of initiative

Local residents have the right to submit initiatives to the local authority in matters related to its operations. Persons submitting initiatives shall be informed of action taken as a result of an initiative. At least once a year, the

council shall be informed of all initiatives submitted in matters within its purview and of action taken as a result.

If the persons submitting an initiative on a matter within the purview of the council represent at least two per cent of the local residents entitled to vote, the matter shall be considered by the council not later than six months after the matter is instituted.

Section 29 Information

Local authorities shall inform their residents about matters that they are considering, plans concerning them, the processing of matters, decisions taken and their effects. If necessary, local authorities shall compile surveys on matters related to municipal services, finances, environmental protection and land use. Residents shall also be told how they can submit questions and opinions to drafters and decision-makers concerning these matters.

When some local function has been delegated to a corporation or foundation, local authorities shall inform their residents about the operations of said corporation or foundation in some suitable manner.

Section 30 Municipal referenda

The council can decide to hold a referendum on any matter resting with the local authority.

Referenda are advisory.

A referendum can be held on a matter concerning the whole area of the local authority or some component area. Said component area shall then comprise one or more voting districts as referred to in the Act on Municipal Elections.

All persons entitled to vote shall have an equal voting right. Voting shall be confidential.

There are separate provisions on the procedure to be followed in a municipal referendum.

Section 31 Referendum proposals

Local residents representing at least five per cent of those entitled to vote may initiate a referendum. The council shall decide without delay whether to hold a referendum as proposed.