

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

PROPOSED RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS IN SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT
CONSULTATION PAPER ON ELECTORAL REFORMTerm Lengths

- **QUESTION 1: Do you think the term length for the Scottish Parliament and local government should be:**
 - 4 years?
 - 5 years?
 - Other length (please specify)?
- Response – Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council considers that the term lengths should be set so as to avoid clashes between elections to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament or local councils. Whilst it might be seen that holding elections on the same day has the potential to increase voter turnout, equally there is the potential for voter confusion given the different voting systems.
- **QUESTION 2: Do you have any other comments or suggestions on term lengths?**
- Response – The Council has no further comment on this issue.

The Electoral Landscape

- **QUESTION 3: Do you agree that the Electoral Management Board for Scotland and the Board's Convener should be given the same functions in relation to Scottish Parliament elections as they already have for local government elections?**
- Response - The Council recognises that the Board already plays an essential role in ensuring that the voter is always at the heart of the electoral process by working with key stakeholders in the management and administration of **all** elections but has no other comment to make on the conferring additional functions on the Board.
- **QUESTION 4: Do you have any other views on the future role of the Electoral Management Board?**
- Response – The Council has no further comment on this issue.

Role of Returning Officers at Scottish Parliament Elections

- **QUESTION 5: Should the Returning Officer appointment for Scottish Parliament elections continue to be on an appointment on a personal basis, independent from Scottish Government and local authority control?**
- Response - The Council recognises that the Returning Officer (RO) is the person with the sole legal responsibility for conducting an election in their area and returning a result in which all stakeholders can have full confidence. The Council also recognises that both in law and in principle the duties of the RO must be separate from any of an individual's duties as a local government officer - hence the requirement that the RO is independent from political control and directly accountable only to the Courts as an independent statutory office holder.
- **QUESTION 6: Should the role of the Returning Officer become part of the job description of local authority Chief Executives? (This is not currently the case and would require renegotiation of terms and conditions.)**
- Response - The Council recognises that each Council requires to appoint an officer of the council to be the Returning Officer (RO) for the election of councillors to the council, and that legislation provides that the RO is responsible for the running of other statutory elections in their area. The Council also recognises that legislation provides that councils must make available to the RO the necessary resources to enable the RO to discharge their functions, but that these resources are not made available as a consequence of the RO being a Chief Executive of the council – reflecting the position both in law and in principle that the duties of the RO must be separate from any of an individual's duties as a local government officer.
- **QUESTION 7: Do you have any other comments or suggestions about who should have the role of Returning Officer or how Returning Officers should be paid?**
- Response - In recognising the position both in law and in principle that the duties of the RO must be separate from any of an individual's duties as a local government officer and that the role is undertaken at the personal risk of the RO, the Council believes that the scale of the remuneration for the role should be determined through an evaluation of the duties.

Local Government Election Ballot Papers: Candidates' Addresses

- **QUESTION 8: Do you agree that candidates' addresses should not be required to appear on ballot papers for local government elections?**
- Response – Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council would comment that the whilst the rationale for the inclusion of a candidate's home address was a

demonstration of local connection, the current position is inconsistent with that of a candidate in a UK Parliament election who can choose whether or not to include their home address on the ballot paper.

- **QUESTION 9: Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**

- Response – The Council has no further comment on this issue.

Local Government Election Ballot Papers: List Order of Candidates' Names

- **QUESTION 10: The Scottish Government would welcome views on this issue.**

- **Do you agree that, in order to counteract the list order effect, a change should be made to the way in which candidates are listed on election ballot papers?**
- **If so, what form of new system would you favour: rotation; randomisation; alphabetical-reverse alphabetical? Any other?**

- Response – Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council believes that in the interest of the voter, any changes to ballot paper design should be thoroughly researched and tested before they are introduced.

- **QUESTION 11: Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**

- Response – The Council has no further comment on this issue.

Electronic voting

- **QUESTION 12: Voting Machines**

- **Would you be happy to use an electronic voting machine in a polling place instead of a traditional ballot paper?**
- **Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?**
- **Would you like to be able to vote at any polling place in Scotland?**
- **Do you have any other comments?**

- Response – Questions 12 and 13 are framed so that they are addressing the voter directly, and as such the Council has no comment to make on this issue.

- **QUESTION 13: Internet and Mobile Phone Voting**

- **If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you choose to use that rather than vote at a polling place or by post?**
- **If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you be more likely to vote?**
- **Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?**
- **Do you have any other comments?**

- Response – Questions 12 and 13 are framed so that they are addressing the voter directly, and as such the Council has no comment to make on this issue.

Boundary Reviews

- **QUESTION 14: Do you think that we should move to a rolling programme of reviews of local government electoral arrangements?**
- Response – Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council believes that local government electoral arrangements should reflect local demographics to ensure that electors are represented on an equitable basis – it is not clear how a rolling programme of reviews would achieve this if the timescale was longer than that of the current periodic reviews.
- **QUESTION 15: Independence of boundary reviews**
 - **Should Scottish Ministers be able to change the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland on Scottish Parliament constituencies and council wards?**
 - **Should the Scottish Parliament be able to challenge the recommendations of the Boundary Commission on Scottish Parliament constituencies and council wards?**
 - **Should the recommendations of the Commission be implemented without change?**
 - **Please comment on your answer.**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council considers that, as with the appointment or Returning Officers, voters must have confidence in the process by which boundaries are determined and so would support the final decision being taken by an independent body.

How many councillors should wards have?

- **QUESTION 16: Should the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland be allowed the flexibility to recommend wards which have between 2 and 5 councillors, instead of 3 or 4 councillors as at present?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, as stated at Question 14 above, the Council believes that local government electoral arrangements should reflect local demographics to ensure that electors are represented on an equitable basis, and would support a change in the number of councillors in a ward if that better reflected importance of local communities in determining boundaries.

Extending the Franchise

- **QUESTION 17: Do you agree that the franchise should be extended to include everyone legally resident in Scotland?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council recognises that the proposal would create practical issues in relation to electoral registration.

- **QUESTION 18: Do you have any views on how long should someone be resident in Scotland before they become eligible to vote?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council recognises that the proposal would create practical issues in relation to electoral registration.
- **QUESTION 19: Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council recognises that the proposal would create practical issues in relation to electoral registration.

Anonymous Registration

- **QUESTION 20: Do you think that we should make it easier for individuals who may be at risk from any form of abuse to register anonymously, whilst maintaining the integrity of the electoral register?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council recognises that the proposal would create practical issues in relation to electoral registration.

Should Electors be able to Vote More Than Once at Local Government Elections?

- **QUESTION 21: Should a voter be allowed to register in more than one local authority area?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council recognises that the proposal would create practical issues in relation to electoral registration.

Voting

- **QUESTION 22: Do you agree that a voter should only be allowed vote once in local government elections in Scotland?**
- Response - Whilst this is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government, the Council recognises that the proposal would create practical issues in relation to electoral registration.

Increasing the Representation of Under-Represented Groups and Making Voting More Accessible

- **QUESTION 23: What other action could the Scottish Government take to widen access to and remove barriers to voting and elected office?**
- Response – In relation to elected office, the Council notes the positive recent experience of the Access to Elected Office Fund. In relation to voting, the Council notes the points made in the Electoral Commission's report '*Elections for Everyone*' published in November 2017 and supports the recommendations for governments, political parties, electoral administrators and carers – including proposing -
 - changes to election forms so they can be easily understood;
 - considering different ways that people with disabilities can vote so they have greater flexibility and choice; and
 - changing the law so that people with disabilities have more choice about who they can take to the polling station with them.

Accessibility

- **QUESTION 24: As well as the above arrangements, is there anything else that could be done to increase the accessibility of elections?**
- Response – The Council has no further comment on this issue.

Improving Gender Balance in Elected Office

- **QUESTION 25: How can the Scottish Government best support gender balance in those elected as MSPs or local councillors?**
- Response – This is a policy issue for determination by Scottish Parliament / Scottish Government.