

**Strategy and External Affairs**  
**Consultation on Scotland's Electoral Future**  
RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM



**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

**1. Name/Organisation**

**Organisation Name**

The Returning Officer, Highland Council

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Barron

**Forename**

Steve

**2. Postal Address**

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**3. Permissions - I am responding as...**

**Individual**

**Group/Organisation**

**Please tick as appropriate**

**(a)** Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

**Please tick as appropriate**

**Yes**  **No**

**(c)** The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

**(b)** Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

**Please tick ONE of the following boxes**

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

**or**

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

**or**

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

**Please tick as appropriate**  
 Yes  No

**(d)** We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

**Please tick as appropriate**

Yes

No

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** Do you have any views about the introduction of alternative methods of voting such as by internet or telephone?

Would the introduction of any such new methods give rise to concerns about security or the wider integrity of the voting system?

If security and other concerns could be met, would you favour the piloting of new voting methods, for example, in a by-election?

Do you have any general comments or suggestions about ways to increase participation and turnout whether through changes to electoral processes or otherwise?

As Returning Officer for the Highland Council, I would support alternative methods of voting, subject to security concerns, particularly on internet voting.

### **Question 2:** [PILOT PROJECT QUESTION]

The Scottish Government welcomes your views about the potential for using a local government by-election to pilot a form of universal postal voting.

This pilot voting method would mean postal ballot forms being issued to all registered electors. Electors would then be able to opt to either return their voting form by post (prior to polling day) or to hand in the completed form to their local polling place on polling day.

Do you have any views on this proposal?

I would support using a local government by-election to pilot universal postal voting. This would, of course require electors to supply personal identifiers to overcome postal vote security concerns. The proposal that completed ballot forms could be handed in to local polling places is not practical. The use of local council offices for this purpose would be a more pragmatic solution.

**Question 3:** Do you believe that young people in secondary and further education are sufficiently well educated about the political landscape and electoral process?

Do you have any views about how best to engage young people in local democracy? What more could be done?

There is evidence in Highland of differing levels of awareness of the political landscape and electoral process, however further work would need to be undertaken in secondary education to raise the overall level of awareness and understanding.

Young people should be encouraged to participate in local democracy. The Highland Council has a Highland Youth Convener whose role, in part, is to support the work of Highland Youth Voice (the youth parliament for the Highlands). HYV is the key way for young people in the Highlands to engage in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Participation in the work of Community Councils is also an important entry level into participating in the democratic process. Reduction of the voting age to 16 across all local and parliamentary elections is an important step in encouraging young people to participate in the electoral process.

**Question 4:** Do you agree that the power to decide the franchise for Scottish elections should sit with the Scottish Parliament?

What are your views on extending the franchise for all Scottish elections to those aged 16 and 17 years who are eligible to be registered on the electoral register?

Yes, and  
Yes.

**Question 5:** Do you have any views about how best to engage people who are at present disinclined to vote?

What might be the best approach to remedying low voter turnout – geographic targeting at wards or constituencies with a history of low turnout or alternatively focusing on key social groups (e.g. students or those from ethnic minorities) whose participation rates are lower than average?

There has been insufficient research in this area. The level of engagement varies by election type (such as a higher turnout being expected at a UK Parliamentary General Election as against the European Parliamentary Election. It is also affected by the type of voting system used.

Local issues and demographics also affect turnout. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Political parties could do more to promote their candidates, particularly in rural areas. Further consideration should be given to local

government election candidates having a free mail drop, referred to in the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002.

People will vote if they believe their vote matters and makes a difference, therefore political parties have a key role in engaging with people who are disinclined to vote.

**Question 6:** Do you have any views on the ballot paper ordering of candidates' names?

Do you consider that listing candidates' names alphabetically by surname is discriminatory?

The current practice of listing candidates alphabetically should continue. This is an established practice, readily understood by electors. There is insufficient evidence to show that electors are inclined to vote for candidates whose names are higher up a ballot paper. Electors may actually choose who they want to vote for. A candidates' ability is not determined by their surname. Randomisation of the order of candidates on a ballot paper introduces an unnecessary process into an already complex electoral system and would confuse electors.

**Question 7(a):** [PILOT PROJECT QUESTION]

The Scottish Government welcomes your views about using a local government by-election to pilot an alternative method of ballot paper ordering of candidates' names.

This pilot voting method would mean a form of random ordering (including the potential use of public lottery as suggested by Gould) or a method of rotation, such as Robson Rotation, described on page 15.

**Question 7(b):**

Do you favour any of the alternative systems set out in the paper - or would you like any other system of ballot paper ordering to be considered for a future pilot exercise?

I do not support any of the alternative systems set out in the paper. The outcome of the pilot would not prove anything without some qualitative analysis of the ability of each candidate and the local circumstances of each individual election. I do believe that electors do actually know who they want to vote for.

**Question 8:** Do you agree that a review should be carried out of the criteria for eligibility to stand in a local government election with the business connection to an area having clearer definitions provided?

Do you agree that, for purposes of being eligible to stand for election, a candidate's designated area to stand should also be the area in which they reside?

This has not been an issue in the Highland Council area and therefore no informed comment can be offered.

**Question 9:** Do you agree that the rules should be reviewed to provide clarity on which successful candidates who are employed by 'arms-length' bodies delivering council services would be required to resign from their employment in order to be a councillor at the relevant council?

Employees of arms-length bodies should be treated the same as local government employees, who are required to resign from their employment within 24 hours of being elected as a councillor.

**Question 10:** In accordance with the Electoral Commission's suggestion and in good time before the next set of Scottish council elections, the Scottish Government intends to consult political parties that contested the 2012 elections, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the Electoral Commission and any other interested stakeholders on the following issues:

- how candidate spending should be regulated and how candidates and agents should be supported to comply with the rules;
- introducing controls on the sources and reporting of donations;
- revising spending rules to include a specific list of items that count against the spending limits for candidates;
- whether candidate spending limits are set at the right level to facilitate campaigning;
- whether party campaign limits should be introduced for council elections;
- whether controls on general campaigning by non-party campaigners should apply at council elections?

Do you have any comments which would inform future work in this area?

There should be more clarity and advice offered to candidates to assist them to meet their legal responsibilities in relation to election expenditure.

**Question 11:** Do you agree that provisions should be introduced to allow Electoral Register Officers to request up-to-date signatures and inform a voter that their postal vote statement has been rejected?

Are there any legislative changes which the Scottish Government could introduce which would help a Returning Officer allow a vote rather than reject it?

Yes – changes should be introduced to enable mixed up household security statements to be accepted by the Returning Officer, enabling their ballot papers to be included in the count.

**Question 12:** Do you have any views on the effectiveness of the Electoral Management Board since it came into being in 2008?

Do you have any views on the future of the Electoral Management Board?

The Electoral Management Board is very effective. Its consultation processes with the election community in Scotland is excellent. Its scope should be widened to include all election processes in Scotland, including Community Council elections, Community land Buy-out ballots, National Forest Land Scheme Ballots, Cairngorm National Park Authority Elections and Crofting Commission Elections.

