

**Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities  
Committee**

**12 June 2014**

Agenda Item	7
Report No	CPE 17/14

**Highland Elections – Encouraging Participation**

**Report by the Elections Manager**

**SUMMARY**

This report provides members with an up-date of recent elections activity aimed at encouraging participation in elections.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Report advises the Committee of the work undertaken by the Election Team and the development of a number of work streams for encouraging participation in elections.

**2.0 BY-ELECTIONS**

2.1 Since the last meeting of the Committee, the Caol and Mallaig by-election has been held. Turnout at the by-election was 34.4%, which is considered to be reasonable when compared to turnout at the recent Black Isle Ward By-election of 35.81% and Landward Caithness of 29.91%. As part of the ongoing programme to encourage participation in elections by young people, Lochaber High School was encouraged to appoint pupils as “Observers” affording the pupils access to the postal vote opening process, polling stations in the Ward and the by-election Count.

**3.0 COMMUNITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS**

3.1 Nine interim Community Council elections were called in May. The number of candidates nominated in seven of the Community Councils was less than the number of councillors that required to be returned and therefore no polls will take place. These Community Councils were Caol, Cromarty and District, Durness, East Nairnshire, Merkinch, Newtonmore and Westhill.

3.2 Targeted Facebook adverts inviting nominations for Merkinch and Westhill Community Councils' elections were seen by 6,844 individuals and by 480 individuals for the Cromarty Community Council election. Dalwhinnie Community Council did not receive sufficient nominations to re-form.

- 3.3 An election will be held on 26 June 2014 for Cromdale and Advie Community Council as the number of candidates was more than the number of councillors to be returned.

#### **4.0 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION**

- 4.1 For the election on 22 May, some 30,000 postal ballots were sent out. A recent change in legislation enabled postal ballot packs to be sent out earlier than previously and in Highland they were dispatched on 2 May. The long lead in period is believed to have contributed to the high return of 20,000 completed ballots.
- 4.2 At the European Parliamentary Election, both the Public Relations and the Election Teams made considerable use of Facebook and Twitter, posting information on the various milestones in the electoral process. The top 3 Facebook posts by the Election Office (all relating to Postal Voting) were seen by 13,176 people on 20 May; 17,408 people on 7 May and 27,712 people on 12 May.

#### **5.0 REFERENDUM**

- 5.1 The Committee will be pleased to note that the Electoral Registration Officer will soon be writing to all 16 and 17 year olds that are on the Young Persons register for the Scottish Independence Referendum on 18 September. Two separate letters will be sent, one to those young persons who have a postal vote and another offering a postal vote to those who do not already have one.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

##### **6.1 Resource Implications**

There are specific resource implications arising from this report, but any additional work involved will be met from the existing Election Team resources.

##### **6.2 Financial and Legal Implications**

There are no specific financial or legal implications contained in this Report.

##### **6.3 Equality Implications.**

The focus on young people is an attempt to address the issue of low participation among this age group in the electoral process.

#### 6.4 Climate Change/ Carbon Clever Implications

There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.

#### 7.0. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 Members are asked to note the ongoing work to encourage participation in elections in Highland.

Designation: Elections Manager

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Author: John Bruce, Elections Manager