

# **ELECTORAL REFORM CONSULTATION – ANALYSIS PUBLICATION**

## **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

### **Background**

The Scottish Government is committed to increasing participation in elections both in terms of voter turnout and encouraging citizens to stand for election. Democratic participation challenges the inequalities of power and influence that exist in society. We need an electoral system that supports and empowers the engagement of the Scottish people in their own elections. Many organisations, including the Electoral Commission, the Electoral Management Board, political parties and local authorities have important roles to play in realising this aim of full engagement. The Scottish Government and Parliament have a specific role to play to ensure that electoral law supports increased participation and removes barriers to voter empowerment.

Under the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament and Government have gained new powers and responsibilities relating to elections to the Scottish Parliament. These complement the existing responsibilities for Scottish Parliament and local government elections. Control over both sets of elections opens up new possibilities for democratic renewal and putting the voter first.

The Scottish Government launched its consultation paper in December 2017, which was the first step towards these reforms. It included a number of suggestions as to how the new powers might be used. The responses to the consultation have now been independently analysed, and the report of that analysis has been published today.

### **Consultation Responses**

The Scottish Government is grateful for over 900 responses to the consultation and thanks respondents for their comments. Detailed responses were also received from organisations with a specific interest in electoral administration, including the Electoral Management Board for Scotland and the Electoral Commission.

As set out in the independent analysis, comments were received on a wide range of topics.

### **Next Steps**

The Scottish Government will use the results of this consultation process to develop policy proposals that will be taken forward in future legislation.

As announced in the Government's Programme for Government the Scottish Government will introduce a Bill on Electoral Reform which will propose a range of electoral reforms including:

- Extending the power of the Electoral Management Board;
- Changes to the process for Local Government boundary reviews;
- Changing the rules so that voters can only vote once at Local Government elections.

The Bill will also include some technical matters, such as transferring oversight of the Electoral Commission to the Scottish Parliament. The system of payments to Returning Officers will be reformed in time for the Scottish Parliament election 2021. We will also have discussions with the Scottish Parliament on term lengths to promote effective Government.

There will also be a Bill on Electoral Franchise which will include provisions to extend the franchise for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections to everyone resident in Scotland. This Bill will be brought forward following a separate consultation on prisoner voting. This is in line with the recommendation made in the Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee's report on prisoner voting published on 14 May 2018 to consult widely on any proposed change.

Some of the topics included in the consultation, such as, removing candidates' addresses from ballots papers and anonymous registration will require changes to secondary legislation and further announcements on reform in these areas will be made in due course.

Views were sought on the order in which candidates' names appear on local government election ballot papers. A form of random ordering to address the alphabetical list order effect was favoured by most respondents. The Government will now consider the practical aspects of taking this forward.

The consultation also sought views on electronic voting. The Government will now consider where and when trials might take place and what the scope should be. Further announcements will be made in due course.

Accessibility emerged as a strong theme in consultation responses. The Scottish Government is committed to exploring how technology and other means can be used to remove barriers to voting.