

LOCAL GOVERNANCE (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND RESPONSES RECEIVED TO 31 OCTOBER 2003

| ISSUE | SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES |
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| STV electoral system | |
| Views on the principle of replacing First Past the Post with STV | Whilst the consultation did not seek views on the principle of introducing STV, 85 of the 187 respondents to the consultation indicated a preference for retaining the First Past the Post system whilst 71 welcomed the introduction of STV. The remainder of the respondents did not express a view. |
| Views on 3/4 member wards in practice | 42 respondents commented on this point. 23 expressed specific concerns that the proposed number of members per ward would not work in remote and rural areas and wanted greater flexibility in the numbers of members (ranging from 1 to 8) where there were exceptional circumstances. |
| The revision of Schedule 6 rules; variation of the rules for different areas in Scotland; issues of parity and local ties in ward boundaries | 15 respondents expressed a view on these issues. 4 commented that revised rules for Sch 6 should be more flexible to retain natural communities and boundaries and move away from the standard of parity where local circumstances demanded. 2 commented that the criteria need to be set out in more detail, possibly in the Bill and a further 2 commented that councils should be directly involved in drawing up proposals for ward boundary reviews. 7 respondents commented that natural communities and boundaries should be retained under any review. |
| Independence of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland | 1 respondent commented that the repeal of Schedule 6 could undermine the independence of the Boundary Commission |
| Implementing STV at combined elections | Over 50 respondents commented on the practical difficulties of implementing STV. The majority of these expressed concern at the practical difficulties of running combined elections using three different electoral systems and cited potential voter confusion, pressure on elections staff and reduced opportunity for campaigning on local issues as reasons. 24 respondents indicated that, if STV were to be introduced, local government elections should be held separately from those for the Scottish Parliament. |
| Timing of election counts | The length, timing and complexity of the counts were issues for 38 respondents - particularly if elections were to remain combined. Present practice of dealing with the Parliamentary and then the local government count over a two day period would be unrealistic. |

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| Streamlining voting procedures such as e-voting and counting | 41 respondents gave views on these points. 38 would welcome the introduction of e-counting given that it would make the process of STV counting easier in principle whilst 1 preferred a manual count. But there were doubts about the accuracy and efficacy of current e-counting systems (28 respondents) and transparency (6 respondents) and these considered that further testing would be needed before a system could be rolled out across Scotland. 8 respondents expressed the view that the introduction of additional innovations such as e-counting/e-voting or all-postal ballots would be too onerous for both voters and election staff whilst 3 commented that it could pose problems if too many changes were introduced at the same time. |
| Views on voter education | 48 respondents stressed the need for an extensive voter awareness/education programme to explain the STV system if the system were to be introduced successfully. |
| Training/resources/funding | 22 respondents specifically mentioned the need for a substantial training package for Returning Officers and elections staff. Of these, 6 considered increased levels of staffing together with additional funding from the Scottish Executive would be needed to cope with the introduction of STV. |
| Bringing procedures for local government elections further into line with those for the Scottish Parliament | 23 respondents expressed the view that there should be further synchronisation of election procedures. |
| Joint proposals for merging council areas/revision of shared boundaries | 28 respondents commented on this issue. 13 of these had no objection to the provisions for joint proposals being included in the Bill whereas 15 expressed the view that they were not appropriate. 3 additionally commented that these issues needed wider debate with 1 expressing the view that if councils wished to pursue joint proposals, a ballot or referendum should first be held. |
| Remuneration | |
| The independent nature of the Remuneration Committee | 15 respondents commented on the independence of the Committee. All expressed the view that the Committee should be fully independent and not subject to influence or Ministerial direction. A small number felt that its members should not have political affiliations and that it should report to the Parliament rather than Ministers |

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| Views on flexibility of the remuneration scheme | 44 respondents commented in total. 37 rejected the idea of a “one-size fits all” approach and considered that any remuneration scheme should be sufficiently flexible to allow individual councils discretion to adapt it to fit local needs and circumstances. 6 specifically commented that the detail of the remuneration scheme, in particular the number of councillors deemed to have additional responsibilities, should be determined locally. 2 respondents commented that increases should be in line with those for MSPs. |
| Views on the nature of councillors’ work (full-time/part-time) | 11 respondents expressed a view. The number of hours worked by councillors was a matter for further investigation. 7 respondents rejected the notion of a “part-time commitment required of the majority of councillors” and 4 commented on the full-time nature of the majority of councillors’ roles. |
| Issues on the extent of severance pay | 22 respondents commented in total. 14 specifically stated their disappointment at the one-off rather than continuing nature of the payment and 5 felt that further clarification was needed on the issue of severance pay. 5 commented that it should be the same as the scheme in place for MSPs. |
| Views on issues of parity with other elected representatives | 11 respondents referred to the need for parity of esteem with other elected representatives and specifically highlighted benchmarking with MSPs in terms of salary levels and increases. 1 commented that a councillor’s remuneration should be 50% of a MSP’s salary. |
| Removing barriers | |
| Views on the provision to alter restrictions which apply to former councillors who wish to seek employment with the council after their period of service comes to an end. | Most respondents expressed general support for proposals in this area. 31 responded specifically on this point: 20 supported the change, 3 opposed any alteration and 8 supported further change. Of these 7, 1 commented that the 12 month ban should be removed and 2 commented that individuals should be able to have a dual councillor/employee role subject to safeguards being in place. |