



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL ON 10 NOVEMBER 2021

SUBJECT: ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2022

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Council of the arrangements in regard to the management of the 2022 Local Government Elections.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section II (9) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to elections.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Council note the arrangements in regard to the management and administration of the 2022 Local Government Elections.**

3. BACKGROUND AND TIMETABLE

- 3.1 Local Government (council) elections for 26 Moray councillors across 8 multi-member wards will be held on Thursday 5 May 2022.
- 3.2 The statutory notice of election, which marks the start of the election period will be published by the Returning Officer on 14 March with the delivery of candidate nominations commencing the following day with a deadline of 30 March, thereafter the Notice of Poll will be published.
- 3.3 Information regarding the poll and accommodation follows in sections 6 and 7 of this report.
- 3.4 The count will take place using Single Transferable Vote (STV) and will be counted electronically (eCount) on Friday 6 May at the Elgin Town Hall, and is expected to conclude around mid-afternoon depending on whether there are any pandemic restrictions remaining at that time.

4. PRE ELECTION PERIOD / NOMINATIONS

- 4.1 The 'pre-election' period is the period between the announcement of an election on Monday 14 March and polling day on Thursday 5 May, inclusive.
- 4.2 The Council's actions with regard to political publicity are governed by the Local Government Act 1986. Updated guidance regarding the 'pre-election' period will be circulated by the Returning Officer prior to the election. The guidance will highlight the need for heightened sensitivity during the election period, ensuring public resources are not used in a way that might prejudice the election result.
- 4.3 The guidance will be circulated among all elected members and staff and managers will be asked to ensure any activity undertaken by staff is in line with the guidance provided, if any doubt arises this will be referred to the Returning Officer in the first instance.

5. AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION

- 5.1 Under Section 26 of the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006 the Returning Officer must take steps during a Local Government election to encourage participation in the electoral process in the area for which they act.
- 5.2 The Elections office will be making use of national candidate and voter awareness and participation materials and dovetailing with national campaigns promoted by the Electoral Commission and CoSLA.
- 5.3 A public pre-nomination information session for prospective candidates will be held in February 2022 and will be advertised in due course. Following the close of nominations, briefing sessions for candidates and appointed election agents will be held by the Returning Officer to communicate conduct, poll and count arrangements.

6. STAFFING

- 6.1 The final 2 months prior to poll require significant additional input and therefore Moira Patrick, Democratic Services Manager and Alasdair McEachan, Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance will be appointed as Depute Returning Officers for the statutory period, 14 March to 6 May 2022.
- 6.2 Approximately 190 temporary polling staff will be recruited and trained by the Elections Office to support around 80 Polling Stations across Moray. In addition approx. 20 temporary staff will be required for Postal Vote Verification and approximately 45 temporary staff to support the eCount.

7. ACCOMMODATION

- 7.1 A temporary elections office will be established within the Council HQ during the election period to maintain the electoral integrity and confidentiality. In addition the training suites within the Council HQ Annexe will be used for postal vote verification during the period 25 April – 8 May 2022.

- 7.2 Approximately 58 venues across Moray will be used as Polling Places. Three primary schools will be used as polling places on 5 May 2022, being Pilmuir, Seafield and Greenwards, with only Greenwards being closed to school pupils on polling day. Operation of these sites will be monitored closely on polling day by polling place inspectors.

8. COUNT

- 8.1 Preparations for the election commenced in 2020 due to the lead-in time for the eCount. The eCount will take place at Elgin Town Hall which will be used from 1 May until 6 May inclusive to allow for the set-up, implementation and dismantling of the eCount equipment by contractors.
- 8.2 Scottish Ministers have put in place a national contract to deliver electronic counting of the votes during the election due to the complex nature of STV. As part of this agreement the Returning Officer (RO), alongside all other Scottish RO's, are working with Fujitsu and the Scottish Government to deliver the electronic counting of ballot papers at this election.

9. ELECTION COSTS

- 9.1 The Council require to budget for an expenditure projected at £199,000 in order to allow the Returning Officer to conduct this election. As in 2017, the Scottish Government will meet the costs associated with the eCounting solution with the local authority meeting related costs within the contract for producing ballot papers, postal voting packs, sundries, count venue hire, staffing and training costs.*

Summary of Budget Estimates

	£ ,000
Poll cards <i>including, printing, postage and Royal Mail licences</i>	32
Postal Voting <i>including, printing, postage, Royal Mail licences and processing and verification costs</i>	49
Polling Station provision <i>including equipment, ballot books, staffing, accommodation and conveyance costs</i>	75
Administration and Office costs <i>including nomination and statutory notice costs and election stationery printing for all polling stations</i>	18
Electronic Count (eCount) <i>including staffing, accommodation and ballot paper costs</i> <i>*excludes eCount software and hardware costs met by Scottish Gov.</i>	25
Total Expenditure for Election	199

9.2 Costs have increased since 2017 in some areas including, but not limited to postage for poll cards and postal votes, publication of notices, increased rental and cleaning costs for polling places, increased temporary staff costs, increased electorate and a higher proportion of electorate choosing to vote by post. The outline costs detailed above are only an estimate and can vary for a number of reasons largely out with our control:

- number of candidates in each ward who stand determine the final size of the ballot papers and sizes of statutory public notices which vary costs;
- final number of postal voters (approx. 26% of electorate) which is not known until the register closes in April, this has a cost implication in terms of postage and stationery;
- the number of postal voters who choose to cast their vote (approx. 71% in 2017) as this has an impact on return postage and processing costs.

9.3 No costs have yet been budgeted for Covid control measures that might be required at the poll or count, as it is unclear what restrictions, if any, will be in place in April-May 2022. Equipment such as screening, retained after the last election in May 2021 will be reused, where appropriate, with consumable costs for sanitiser and masks for example arising in addition to those costs outlined in paragraph 9.1 above.

10. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

Election processes support the corporate and LOIP plan values of promoting equalities and awareness, and empowering community participation and involvement.

(b) Policy and Legal

The administration of all elections is a statutory duty of the Local Authority and subject to the main legal provisions noted below:

- Representation of the People Act 1983
- The Scottish Local Government Elections Order 2011
- Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2009
- Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006
- Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020
- The Council's actions with regard to political publicity are governed by the Local Government Act 1986

There are approximately 39 pieces of other legislation pertaining to the conduct of these elections.

(c) Financial implications

The projected cost of the election is approx. £199,000 to the Council as outlined in Section 9.

(d) Risk Implications

The statutory electoral process, management and planning of the election is subject to project plans, business continuity plans, risk assessment and registers as required and as part of the Returning

Officer's obligation to meet performance standards monitored by the Electoral Commission.

(e) Staffing Implications

As outlined in Section 4 – Staffing. The Democratic Services Manager will retain all existing management responsibilities whilst taking on the additional responsibilities of Depute Returning Officer. The Elections Officer, Committee Services & Elections Support Officer and Democratic Services Manager will undertake additional hours to accommodate the workload required to deliver this election.

(f) Property

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (s.96) a candidate is entitled, for the purpose of holding public meetings, to the use free of charge at reasonable times, local authority maintained meeting rooms or school.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

Under the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006 (s.26) the Returning Officer must take such steps to encourage participation by electors in the electoral process in the area for which they act. The Returning Officer will administrate the election in line with existing measures in electoral legislation relating to provisions made for overseas voters, disabled voters, postal and proxy voters, accessibility, large print notices and support for voters in polling stations, and promote the national fund for disabled candidates to access the electoral process. This is in addition to supporting and disseminating information relating to national campaigns specifically targeting certain demographic groups.

(h) Consultations

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team regarding the briefing session for potential candidates.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 The Council has a statutory duty in regard to all matters relating to elections. It is recommended that the Council notes the proposed arrangements for the Local Government Elections and rescheduling of the Council meeting as outlined.

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