SIAA Response

Consultation on Electoral Reform

March 2018

Consultation Paper on Electoral Reform

1. **Do you think the term length for the Scottish Parliament and local government should be:**
   - 4 years?
   - 5 years?
   - Other length (please specify)?

2. **Do you have any other comments or suggestions on term lengths?**
   It seems good practice to bring the term length of the Scottish Parliament and local government in line with those of Northern Ireland and Wales.
   In addition, longer parliamentary terms have been regarded as helping to facilitate longer term policy planning and greater consultation which should be a priority.
   However opportunities for accountability need to be planned and implemented.

3. **Do you agree that the Electoral Management Board and the Board's Convenor should be given the same functions in relation to Scottish Parliament elections as they already have for local government elections?**
   Unsure.

4. **Do you have any other views on the future role of the Electoral Management Board?**
   No.

5. **Should the Returning Officer appointment for Scottish Parliament elections continue to be on an appointment on a personal basis, independent from Scottish Government and local authority control?**
   Don't know.

6. **Should the role of the Returning Officer become part of the job description of local authority Chief Executives? (This is not currently the case and would require renegotiation of terms and conditions.)**
   Don't know.

7. **Do you have any other comments or suggestions about who should have the role of Returning Officer or how Returning Officers should be paid?**
   No.

8. **Do you agree that candidates' addresses should not be required to appear on ballot papers for local government elections?**
   Yes – candidates' addresses should not appear on ballot papers for local government elections.

9. **Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**
   Candidates' addresses are not shown on ballot papers for Scottish Parliament elections so it would be in keeping to apply the same protocol to local government candidates.

10. **The Scottish Government would welcome views on this issue:**
    - Do you agree that, in order to counteract the list order effect, a change should be made to the way in which candidates are listed on election ballot papers?
    - If so, what form of system would you favour: rotation; randomisation; alphabetical-reverse alphabetical? Any other?
    Unsure

11. **Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**
    No.

12. **Voting machines:**
    - Would you be happy to use an electronic voting machine in a polling place instead of a traditional ballot paper?
    - Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?
    - Would you like to be able to vote at any polling place in Scotland?
    - Do you have any other comments?
    Voting needs to be secure, verifiable and anonymous. It needs to ensure that it avoids abuse, coercion and family voting and that it abides by the EU & UN declarations of human rights.
    While the implementation of electronic voting machines would bring Scotland in line with European and International best practice, the machines are still vulnerable to attack and there is no opportunity for a genuine recount. Privacy needs to be at the forefront of the voting experience.

    The machines would be beneficial for voter registration, people who have experienced domestic abuse, or to allow people to vote in a polling station other than their home station. However we believe that a variety of voting methods need to be available in order to ensure full accessibility.

    Section 259 of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 entitles those individuals with mental health issues (including dementia, autism and learning disabilities) to an independent advocate. We believe that having access to an independent advocate to support them through the voting process is vital.

    We believe that people would be more inclined to vote if the polling period was longer – it may be useful to allow people to vote over a weekend or make Polling Day a national holiday. It may also be useful to place the polling station in a public location such as a supermarket or library.

    We also believe that strong consideration needs to be given to ensuring access to voting for those individuals who are in hospitals, who are institutionalised (including the prison service) and are homeless.

13. **Internet and Mobile Phone Voting:**
    - If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you choose to use that rather than vote at a polling place or by post?
    - If internet or mobile phone voting was available, would you be more likely to vote?
    - Would you like voting to be possible on more than one day?
    - Do you have any other comments?
    As aforementioned, privacy should be at the forefront of the voting experience and while we welcome the

government's aim to make voting more accessible, we believe that people's right to privacy and anonymity is paramount.

Full accessibility is key and a variety of voting methods should be made available.

14. **Do you think that we should move to a rolling programme of reviews of local government electoral arrangements?**

We believe that community participation and engagement in review processes is vital and a rolling programme would support that.

15. **Independence of boundary reviews:**
    - Should Scottish Ministers be able to change the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland on Scottish Parliament constituencies and council wards?
    - Should the recommendations of the Commission be implemented without change?
    - Please comment on your answer.

Unsure

16. **Should the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland be allowed the flexibility to recommend wards which have between 2 and 5 councillors, instead of 3 or 4 councillors at present?**

Unsure

17. **Do you agree that the franchise should be extended to include everyone legally resident in Scotland?**

Yes

18. **Do you have any views on how long should someone be resident in Scotland before they become eligible to vote?**

Everyone should have the right to vote, regardless of how long they have been resident

19. **Do you have any other comments to make on this issue?**

20. **Do you think that we should make it easier for individuals who may be at risk from any form of abuse to register anonymously, whilst maintaining the integrity of the electoral register?**

Individuals who may be at risk from any form of abuse should be given the opportunity to register anonymously.

21. **Should a voter be allowed to register in more than one local authority area?**

No

22. **Do you agree that a voter should only be allowed vote once in local government elections in Scotland?**

Yes

23. **What other action could the Scottish Government take to widen access to and remove barriers to voting and elected office?**

We are unsure that changing the means of voting will affect the number of people who vote. Instead, we believe that the focus should be on voter literacy and education (including it in school curriculum), engagement programmes and on increasing confidence between citizens and local government.

24. **As well as the above arrangements, is there anything else that could be done to increase the accessibility of elections?**

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increasing access to the democratic process. We believe that a variety of voting methods is key to ensuring that people with disabilities, prisoners and those in hospital are able to fully participate and we believe that extending the voting period would be beneficial to the majority of individuals.

We believe that the age of voting should be 16 years old in line with the other rights of young people at that age.

We believe that developing and implementing a clear, inclusive and accessible voter engagement programme is key to increasing the accessibility of elections.