

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## Report by Chief Executive

Council: 25 January 2012

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### **Subject: The Electoral Commission : Timing of Election Counts Issues Paper**

#### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1** To advise Elected Members of the recent paper published by the Electoral Commission on the subject of election count timing and to provide an opportunity for Council to discuss the key issues raised and provide feedback on whether changes are needed to the count process. The Electoral Commission paper is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. Responses to the paper are requested by 3 February 2012 and the Commission aim to publish the results by mid-March 2012.

#### **2 Background**

- 2.1** The Electoral Commission, in their report on the Scottish Parliament election said a paper would be circulated for comment as a number of issues have arisen in relation to election counts in recent years.
- 2.2** The timing of counts is a significant issue for those involved in elections. The Electoral Commission believe it is time to consider whether there needs to be a change in the way decisions on the timing of counts are made – in order to deliver benefits for voters, candidates standing in elections and those responsible for delivering the elections.

#### **3 Main Issues**

##### **3.1 General**

- 3.1.1** The Commission are seeking the views of different stakeholder groups and the Chief Executive will respond separately in her capacity as Returning Officer. This role is entirely distinct from the office of Chief Executive of the Council and consequently a separate response is appropriate.
- 3.1.2** The paper is set out in such a way as to seek responses to questions and these are posed throughout Section 3, Key Issues and Section 4, Ways Forward. The questions summarised on pages 35-36.

## **3.2 Section 3 – Key Issues**

**3.2.1** The paper sets out in some detail the general procedures and processes adopted at a variety of election types and indeed count types, pages 14-21. This is followed by a question on page 21:

**Are there any other general factors that impact on the administration of election counts?**

**3.2.2** On pages 22-24 the perspective of political stakeholders is explored. The question on which the Commission would particularly welcome feedback is posed at page 24:

**Are there any other significant perspectives from governments, candidates and political parties on election counts?**

**3.2.3** Further questions posed in Section 3 are aimed at public broadcasters and the general public.

## **3.3 Section 4 – Ways Ahead**

**3.3.1** Section 4 seeks views on potential ways forward to ensure voters can concentrate on the substantive issues of the election and not be distracted by public debate as to the timing of the count.

**3.3.2** The question posed on page 28 in relation to UK Parliamentary general elections is:

**Should the requirement for (Acting) RO's at UK Parliamentary general elections to start counting within four hours of close of poll be revisited in the event of combination or a significant change to electoral process?**

**3.3.3** In relation to European Parliamentary elections the question on page 28 is:

**Is any change required to the current practice of reaching decisions as to the timing of European Parliamentary election counts?**

**3.3.4** On page 29, in relation to the Scottish Parliament the question posed is:

**Is any change required to the current practice of reaching decisions, led by the Elections Convenor, as to the timing of Scottish Parliament election counts?**

**What other views might be sought and how should this be done?**

**3.3.5** Local Elections in Scotland are considered on pages 31 and 32 and whilst no specific question is posed, members may wish to note the suggestion that the EMB undertake a full and inclusive consultation in Scotland.

**3.3.6** Other types of elections are considered in the Issues paper but the questions above are most likely to be relevant to Elected Members to consider.

**3.3.7** In addition to the questions posed in the paper views are also sought, on page 34, on a number of principles that the Electoral Commission believe could improve the approach to the timing of counts at future elections:

- **Dialogue should take place between politicians, political party representatives and ROs, and be informed by input from broadcasters and news organisations. Their input is important since it is through them that most voters get to know the results of elections.**
- **In order to allow political parties and candidates to campaign and voters to make their choices on the substantive issues at the heart of the election, decisions on the timing of the count should be taken outside of the campaign period proper.**
- **Decisions on election counts must be taken early enough to enable effective planning by ROs.**
- **Reasons for ROs' decisions should take account of views expressed and be explained, in all the circumstances of the case.**

#### **4. People Implications**

**4.1** There are no people implications.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

**5.1** There are no financial implications.

## **6. Risk Analysis**

**6.1** There are no risks to the Council associated with responding to this consultation.

## **7. Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)**

**7.1** No issues are identified regarding potential equality impact of this paper.

## **8. Strategic Assessment**

**8.1** Consideration of this report in relation to the Strategic Priorities of the Council is not applicable.

## **9. Conclusions and Recommendations**

**9.1** Members are asked to consider and comment as appropriate, on the questions raised by the Electoral Commission paper.

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**Joyce White**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Date: 12 January 2012**

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**Appendix 1:** Electoral Commission : The timing of election counts Issues Paper

### **Background Reports:**

**Wards Affected:** All