Scotland’s Democratic Future:
Exploring electronic voting, the challenges & opportunities

Andy O’Neill, Head of Electoral Commission, Scotland

29 November 2017
Aim of presentation

• Provide some context for today’s discussion
  – Scotland’s electoral process
  – Who does what
  – What we do
  – Changes in the devolutionary settlement

• EC thoughts on modernising elections
  – What occurred in the past
  – Some thoughts to consider for the future
Scotland’s electoral process
Different electoral systems used in Scotland

- **Scottish Parliament**: 129 Members, Additional Member System (First Past the Post and closed party lists - modified d’hondt)

- **Local Government in Scotland**: 32 Councils, 1227 Councillors, 3 or 4 multi-member wards, Single Transferable Vote

- **House of Commons**: 650 Members, [59 from Scotland] First Past the Post

- **European Parliament**: 73 UK Members elected in June 2014, Proportional Representation (regional list, pure D’Hondt) except in Northern Ireland (3 Members, Single Transferable Vote)
Voter Registration

- Foundation of the electoral system

- c4.1 million entries currently on the electoral register in Scotland

- Commission research estimated across the UK that 13-15% not registered – research suggests this made up of 17-24 year olds, private renters and home movers

- Registration by Individual electoral registration since Sept 2014 in Scotland
Roles and responsibilities

• Administering elections is the responsibility of the 32 individual local government Returning Officers.

• Electoral registration is undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers.

• Legislation for elections is the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament (SP and Council) and UK Parliament (UKPGE and EPE).

• Overall co-ordination role belongs to the EMB.

• Guidance, awareness and reporting is the role of the EC.
The Electoral Management Board (EMB) for Scotland

- Established 2009
- Statutory role from 2011
- The Board has “the general function of co-ordinating the administration of local elections in Scotland.”
- Aims for consistency, co-ordination, single point of contact, economies of scale.
- Voter at the centre
Some other major players

• Police Scotland
• COPFS
• Royal Mail
• Boundary Commissions
• Parties, candidates and agents
• The media
• Various suppliers (printers, EMS suppliers)

• And most importantly the voter
Electoral Commission role in elections

- Set and monitor performance standards for local election officials
- Provide detailed guidance for local election officials and candidates and agents
- Public awareness work to make sure people know how to cast their vote (election date, polling station opening hours, how to fill in ballot papers)
- Report on how every major election is conducted
- Administer observers scheme
- Keeping Electoral Law under review
- Recommend changes to governments and parliaments/assemblies
EC Core Functions

- register political parties (c451 GB, c32 NI)
- register 3\textsuperscript{rd} Parties (c52)
- make sure people understand and follow the rules on party and election finance
- publish details of where political parties get money from and how they spend it
Objectives 1. Transparency and integrity in party and election finance

2. Well-run elections, referendums and electoral registration

- So that people trust the process and have confidence in the result

- We put the voter first
Changing devolutionary settlement

- Elections 50:50 or 2/3rd and 1/3rd
- Registration is 50:50
  - Digital Portal reserved
  - Consistency in process to help voter is important
So where are we currently

• High levels of public confidence that elections well run
• Confidence in registration system high
• A desire to see online voting exists, higher in younger voters
• Important not to lose that confidence
Some thoughts on modernising elections
Why modernise elections

- Improves the electoral process in the interests of the voter
- Could increase accessibility and reduce rejected votes
- Does it increase turnout?
- Could create greater voter choice in the way they exercise their vote
- A desire for change
What done in the past

• Pilots 2002 to 2007 in England
• Commission evaluated the pilots
• Pilots covered such things as:
  – All postal
  – Voting in places other than polling places
  – Advance voting
  – Electronic remote voting
E-voting pilots 2002-2007

- Tested a number of solutions, including:
  - remote Internet voting,
  - remote telephone voting,
  - kiosk voting and networked “vote anywhere” polling stations.
Pilots in Scotland

- 4 undertaken, all-postals at by-elections
- Commission evaluated the pilots
- Less opportunity to pilot than in England
E-counting in Scotland

- Introduced in 2007 because of STV
- Used at 2007, 2012 and 2017 Council elections
- Lessons for future
  - Time to plan
  - Review transparency
  - Overall responsibility for management of project should lie with the EMB
Future pilots in Scotland?

- Lack of opportunity
- Develop an ‘off the shelf pilot package’
- Need prior agreement of ROs
- Are there limitations in piloting at a single by-elections?
- Alternative opportunities to pilot (National Parks/Crofters Commission/School elections/Scottish Youth Parliament, others?)
E-voting in the future

• Lessons from the 2002-07 pilots to consider:
  – Whatever is rolled out must be secure, reliable and be fully tested
  – Can command the confidence of the voter
  – The necessary costs must be able to be met by the public purse
E-voting in the future

• Lessons from the 2002-07 pilots to consider:
  – Be transparent to ensure stakeholder acceptance of the technology
  – Allow ROs to make informed choices regarding procurement and use of technology
  – Needs to be accredited and certified to provide independent assurance
E-voting in the future

• Lessons from the 2002-07 pilots
  – Good project and risk management needs to be in place,

And

– Consider and take into account the broader context within which the debate on the use of internet voting is currently being conducted, including the potential for cyber attacks
Final thoughts

• Welcomes opportunity to contribute to debate
• Want to assist Scottish Government explore the new digital opportunities
• We recognise the shift to use of digital in society and an expectation for future use
• However, it’s ultimately about the voter and we need to maintain their trust and confidence in the electoral system
• E-voting may have a part in increasing voter participation and providing choice in means of voting but it needs to be properly assessed before decisions taken on future use
• Central to any decision is that voters must have trust in the electoral system.
Contact Details:

Andy O’Neill
Head of Electoral Commission, Scotland
The Electoral Commission
Lothian Chambers,
59-63 George IV Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1RN

Tel: 0131 225 0201
Fax: 0131 225 0205
E-Mail: aoneill@electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk