SUBMISSION FROM ARGYLL AND BUTE RETURNING OFFICER

1 - Voting turnout increased. The view of staff involved with election work for in some case 20 years or more is that almost everything that can be done to facilitate voter turnout in terms of process has been undertaken. There remain options around matters such as early voting, online voting, all postal, Saturday or Sunday elections as possible means of encouraging participation.

It does appear that lack of engagement by political parties with grass roots issues has meant that for many citizens it is hard to determine what the difference will be between choosing one party or candidate over another. The media sources now available ensure that citizens can choose to ignore information about political matters and perhaps only engage when it directly affects them. There is an information overload that ensures that traditional methods of voter engagement have limited impact and perhaps political parties need to look at how they communicate information. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some voters still seek leaflets or door step visits to communicate policy ideas and will raise the lack of such material with election staff on or close to election day.

2 - voter registration –no comments new individual registration is to be introduced to early to say what impact this will have

3 - Proxy /postal voting. There is substantial resource tied up in delivering the extended entitlement to these options and generally the timescales and security mechanisms are costly and take up lots of staff time to deliver. It is unclear what percentage of voters now using these methods would have decided not to vote had the options not been open to them. There is and always has been a greater return of postal voters than for those voting at polling stations but that must partly be accounted for by those voters being the most committed to participating .It is suggested that attending at a station to vote may create a greater awareness of the civil responsibility of participating in the process which ought to be motivated by both party political and democratic considerations.

4 - Terminology –There are phrases or words that carry a particular legal meaning bound up in statute or common law that candidates and parties ought to require to be aware of .There are few phrases that directly affect the voter that aren’t commonly understood e.g. proxy and it is unclear whether there is a need to revise terminology and where the evidence of such a need exists.

5 - Reasons why people don’t vote. The anecdotal views represented to staff are

-can’t be bothered nothing will change

don’t know what the people standing are proposing

-my party isn’t represented in this ward
- don’t understand the voting system this time

- no interest in politics

There is clearly some disconnect between the political parties and voters it is unlikely further administrative change will correct this.

6 - The Robson rotation proposal would create a dilemma for election staff around checking the accuracy of ballot paper information when receiving the materials from the printer and would make checking manually very difficult. It would also make manual counts redundant as the risks of errors would be hugely increased by random papers and even if a process was followed would slow a manual count markedly.

7 - There have been no issues around diversity or the nomination process in Argyll and Bute.

8 - Every effort should be made to avoid combined elections particularly if they involve different voting requirements as this confuses voters.

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15th February 2013