SUBMISSION FROM DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL

1. I refer to your email of 29 January 2013 asking for my views, as Leader of the Council, on a number of matters relating to the 2012 Scottish Local Government Elections.

2. I have responded to the matters being investigated as detailed below. Please note that these are my personal views as a Political Leader and not necessarily those of my fellow Councillors.

Voter turnout and how this can be increased?
3. In general, issue around voter participation/publicity is always at the top of the list and stems back to a certain extent to publicity or lack thereof. The Electoral Commission stated in its report “better planned public awareness activity could have raised levels of awareness; it is therefore important that measures are in place to ensure that this will happen before any future elections and referendums.

4. While there is an onus on Returning Officers to increase voter participation, Political Parties also have a duty to ensure that they do enough to raise awareness of candidates and manifestos.

Voter registration and how this can be increased?
5. Voter registration is a matter for the ERO and in Dumfries and Galloway there are concerted efforts during and out with the canvass period to promote voter registration.

Use of proxy voting including postal voting?
6. In Dumfries and Galloway, around 22% of the electorate choose to vote by post/proxy and this yields around 70-80% returns thus demonstrating the high uptake of this form of voting. Given the increasing costs of running elections in terms of use of polling places, hiring of poll staff and transportation costs of boxes to the count, there is an argument that all postal voting may be the way forward.

The terminology used in and around elections?
7. The Electoral Commission’s guidance is focused on the design of usable and accessible forms and notices that put voters’ needs first and enable them to vote confidently, according to their intentions. It provides guidance based on accepted industry good practice and findings from research with the public.

8. In Dumfries and Galloway, polling station notices are translated into the 6 main languages spoken in the region, other than English. There was no feedback from poll staff to suggest that there were any major issues with the terminology used in either the ballot paper or the guidance posters.

9. The Postal Voting statement and guidance on how to vote has been subject to similar changes to ensure that it is user friendly, however, there remains some confusion over the availability of ‘waivers’ and that there is no ability for those with power of attorney to sign on the voter’s behalf.

Reasons why people do not vote?
10. There are a number of reasons why people do not use their right to vote – lack of information, apathy, perceptions that all politicians ‘the same’ and so. Perhaps there is a need to ensure that democracy and civic education feature more prominently in the curriculum to ensure that the importance of using the right to vote is embedded at an early age.

11. Feedback has suggested that a number of voters were reluctant to vote having had no information on the candidates standing. In the 2010 Health Board Pilot Elections, voters received an information booklet containing a brief biography of each candidate and what they stood for. Whilst this was an all postal ballot therefore each voter received this booklet directly, there is a lesson to be learned in terms of ensuring that voters know more about who is standing other than their political persuasion.

**Potential use of Robson Rotation in respect of the ordering of the ballot paper?**

12. I’m not familiar with this system other than it has been used in Tasmania/Australia for a number of years where voting is compulsory. I would imagine that having various forms of the ballot paper would be an administrative challenge.

13. There is no evidence to suggest that there was any ‘donkey voting’ in Dumfries and Galloway ie the practice of numbering the candidates in the order in which appear on the ballot paper, instead of numbering them according to one's preference and the information published on the preference reports bears this out.

**Diversity amongst voters and elected representatives including any matters associated with the eligibility to stand, donations and the nomination process?**

14. I am not aware of any issues regarding the nomination process from my own perspective of that of my colleagues. The nomination process and eligibility rules for local government elections are clear and straightforward. I understand, however, that the Electoral Commission is seeking to clarify whether or not employees of ALO’s require to resign on election.

**The timing of future local elections with a view to minimising clashes with other elections?**

15. I was under the impression this had been resolved due the de-coupling of local government elections.

Ivor Hyslop
Leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council