Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
Thursday 8 October 2026 (Session 7)

Officeholders – Electoral Management Board draft Strategic Plan

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider and provide comments on the Electoral Management Board for Scotland's (EMB) draft strategic plan for the period 2027-28 to 2031-32. A copy of the draft Strategic Plan is attached at Annex A.

Issues and Options

Background

2. The EMB has a statutory duty to lay a Strategic Plan before the Parliament for each 5-year period, following a national local government election, setting out how it will perform its functions. Before a plan can be laid, Officeholders must provide a draft of their plan and invite comments from the SPCB and any other body or person the officeholder considers appropriate, including a committee of the Parliament.

3. Officeholders have been laying plans before the Parliament since 2010. The attached draft plan covers the period 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2032. It is required to set out (a) the objectives and priorities for the 5-year period, (b) how they will be achieved, (c) a timetable and (d) estimates of the costs.

EMB draft Strategic Plan

4. The EMB was set up on an interim basis in 2008 and became a statutory body as a result of the Local Electoral Administration (Scotland) Act 2011. Its purpose is to promote best practice in electoral administration and to support the electoral community in Scotland to deliver elections safely, securely and successfully.

5. This is the first five-year strategic plan prepared by the EMB since it became a body corporate, on 1 April 2026, when the relevant sections of the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act 2025 were commenced.

6. The Board is made up of the Convener plus five Returning Officers and three electoral registration officers. The Board is supported by a Head of Office/Secretary who is on a 0.6FTE basis and seconded from the City of Edinburgh Council. It is currently recruiting for a Projects and Operations Manager and a Business Administrator.

7. The EMB identifies three operational themes in its draft Strategic Plan.

8. Details on the three themes, including how they align with functions and timescales are provided in the tables below:

Operational Theme: 1 Preparing for the next election

Operational Theme	Alignment with EMB functions	Timescale
Preparing for the next election (i.e. the Scottish Local Government Elections to be held on 6 May 2027)	• **Co-ordinating the administration of local government elections in Scotland;** • **Assisting returning officers, local authorities and other persons in carrying out their functions in relation to local government elections; and** • **Promoting best practice local government elections by providing information, advice or training (or otherwise)**	• **Directions** to be issued by the Convener of the EMB by **5 November**, 6 months ahead of the polls • **Polling Day** – **6 May 2027** • **Count** – **7 May 2027**
Costing – proposed work is costed within the EMB budget detailed below		

Operational Theme 2: Building Capacity

Operational Theme	Alignment with EMB functions	Timescale
Building Capacity among Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer Teams	• **Promoting best practice local government elections by providing information, advice or training (or otherwise)**	• Develop standard models and materials- target **end 2029** • Common training options- target **end 2029** • Workforce Strategy target **end 2028** • Negotiate national contracts- target **end 2029** • Shared services/joint delivery options - **target end 2029** • Royal Mail negotiations and problem resolution – target **end 2026**
Costing – proposed work is costed within the EMB budget detailed below		

Operational Theme 3: Shaping the future

Operational Theme	Alignment with EMB functions	Timescale
Shaping the future / Modernising Elections	• **Promoting best practice local government elections by providing information, advice or training (or otherwise)**	• Promotion of structural change across the sector – target **end 2028** • Reaction to automated registration – target **end 2027** • Digital options for poll cards – target **end 2027** • Input to revised legislation – **ongoing** • Support for pilots for new voting methods – **target end 2027** • Utilisation of new technology in polling – **ongoing**
Costing – proposed work is costed within the EMB budget detailed		

9. **Electoral Management Board for Scotland Budget bid for 2027/28**

EMB	Budget Bid for 2027/28 £	Indicative Budget Bid for 2028/29 £	Indicative Budget Bid for 2029/30 £	Indicative Budget Bid for 2030/31 £	Indicative Budget Bid for 2031/32 £
Total Staff Costs	**263,871**	**325,178**	**330,853**	**336,530**	**342,405**
Total Staff Related Costs	**19,500**	**19,500**	**19,500**	**19,500**	**19,500**
Total Property Costs	**3,000**	**3,000**	**3,000**	**3,000**	**3,000**
Total Professional Fees	**30,000**	**30,000**	**30,000**	**30,000**	**30,000**
Total Running Costs	**31,750**	**31,750**	**31,750**	**31,750**	**31,750**
Total Revenue Costs	**348,121**	**409,428**	**415,103**	**420,780**	**426,655**

10. The Strategic Plan advises that key immediate actions to move work forward around these operational themes will cover:

- **Recruitment of Staff** – the EMB needs an enhanced resource to achieve its objectives. agree Job Descriptions, submit staffing structure to SPCB and commence recruitment for "Projects and Operations Manager" for EMB; plus admin support
- **Website** - refresh

- **Full Support for delivery of SLGE2027** – Directions, Conference, Seminars, Support
- **Visits to ROs and EROs** – the Convener and Secretary are undertaking a prioritised series of visits to meet, learn from and assess needs of RO and ERO teams across Scotland to inform both training and capacity building activities

Immediate Actions 2026/27	Outline	Schedule
Recruitment of Staff to EMB	• Projects and Operations Manager • Admin Officer	• Recruitment to commence September 2026
Website	• EMB Website to be refreshed	• Target completion Spring 2027
Full Support for delivery of SLGE2027	• Directions to be issued by Convener • Conference for ROs and EROs • Specific Seminars for ROs and EROs • Ad hoc Support for RO and ERO teams	• Direction issued by **5 November** 2026 • Conference **24 November** 2026 • Seminars from **December 2026** through April 2027 • **Ongoing** ad hoc support
Visits to ROs and EROs	• Convener and Secretary of the EMB undertaking visits to all RO and ERO teams	• Prioritised visits commenced **June 2026**

11. The estimated costs included in the plan are in line with those submitted as part of the 2027 budget approval process.

Governance

12. The Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act 2025 states that the SPCB-

    a) must examine each strategic plan submitted to it,

    b) must decide whether it is satisfied with the plan, and

    c) if it is not so satisfied, may recommend such modifications to the plan as it considers appropriate.

Resource Implications

13. Providing estimated costs in a draft Strategic Plan is a statutory requirement. The SPCB commenting on a draft plan does not guarantee future funding and we will make this clear when we responding to the officeholder. The officeholders' budgets are subject to annual approval by the SPCB.

Publication Scheme

14. This paper may be published once the Strategic Plan is made public.

Decision

15. The SPCB is invited to consider and provide any comments of the draft Strategic Plan from the Electoral Management Board for Scotland.

Officeholder Services
October 2026