

# **STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**

## **SCOTTISH ELECTIONS (REFORM) BILL**

### **WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM COUNCILLOR CAROLINE BAMFORTH**

With reference to the above bill currently under consideration at committee stage, I write to express my strong desire that the opportunity is taken to amend the present procedures and practises, which result in the publication of the private addresses of those seeking election to local authorities.

Unlike candidates seeking election to Scottish, UK or European Parliaments, the protections afforded those candidates, in reference to the privacy of their home addresses, are sadly lacking for those seeking to be local Councillors.

I write to ask that the opportunity is not missed to change the legislation which results in such disparity. This should be a matter of urgent priority in order to protect the safety of those seeking election and that of their families. In the age of instant Internet access, social media, and a volatile political landscape, politicians at all levels have experienced an increase in abuse and threats to their personal safety.

Local Councillors are no exception to this and deserve the same protections as other elected members.

So far as council candidates are concerned there are a number of ways in which presently their home addresses are publicised:

- Their home address is reproduced on every ballot paper
- Their home address is published on the Notice of Poll document
- Their home address is published on the declaration document advising whom they have appointed as their Election Agent – this is particularly obvious intimation of a home address where a candidate is acting as their own Agent
- Nomination Papers lodged with the Returning Officer - which include a home address - are open for public inspection

These disclosures are required to be made before the point that elections are contested and apply to all candidates. Those who go on to be successful in their election have further opportunities which lay them open to personal disclosure of their home address, such as through the Register of Members' Interests, where they have to declare their ownership of property.

Although some councils have given the option of removal of addresses from online searches in this regard, physical inspection of the register is still open to members of the public and the risk therefore remains.

On a personal note, as an elected member of a Scottish local authority, I have myself received hate mail to my home address and had to endure trolling and abuse on social media and in person. I had the local police check the security of my house after some worrying (anonymous) correspondence, on the advice of Council officers. The fact that despite my best efforts to remove my home address from public searches, it is still open to all members of the public to know where I live, gives myself and my family a level of unease which I believe is unacceptable.

I therefore ask, that the committee make moves to end the disparity which sees protections for parliamentarians but not for Councillors or candidates seeking election to council. This is a serious and urgent matter, due to the changing political climate of recent years and I trust the context of this is understood and that you will give this matter your full consideration as a committee.

I would be happy to be contacted to discuss the above and offer whatever assistance necessary.

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7 NOVEMBER 2019**