[redacted]

From: FOI
Sent: 21 February 2024 08:41
To: [redacted]
Subject: FOI 011-24 - Response
Attachments: Combined files - REDACTED.pdf

Dear [redacted],

Our Ref: FOI-011-24

Thank you for your email to the Electoral Commission dated 25 January 2024.

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and has done so within the statutory timeframe of twenty working days.

Your request is shown below followed by our response.

Please could you provide copies of any research/correspondence/documents in relation to assessing the impact of voter ID on the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election held on 5 October 2023.

Our response is as follows:

We hold the information you have requested.

Following each of the UK Parliament by-elections which took place in 2023, the Electoral Commission collated information from the relevant Returning Officers in order to assess the impact of the voter ID policy of the UK Government. The data collected has been published on our website: UK parliamentary by-elections in 2023 | Electoral Commission

The information we are releasing relates to our correspondence with the Returning Officer's staff at South Lanarkshire council in relation to voter ID at the 5 October 2023 by-election for Rutherglen and Hamilton West and our internal correspondence. Please see the attached document.

Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act

You will notice that certain personal details have been redacted from the documents we are releasing. Section 40(2) of the FOI Act provides for an exemption where the information requested constitutes personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA), and where release of the information requested would breach one of the data protection principles. Some of the information contained in the requested information falls within the description of personal data as defined by the DPA because the information relates directly to an identifiable living individual. This includes names and contact details of individuals in some instances. The individuals in some cases are junior staff members and they would not reasonably expect their information to be released.

The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority and I trust that this information satisfies your request.

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at: https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/freedom-information/make-a-freedom-information-request.

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: https://ico.org.uk/.

Yours sincerely

Information Officer
FOI@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission
electoralcommission.org.uk

Excerpt of note from post-poll meeting with South Lanarkshire Council elections staff on the running of the by-election

[redacted]**:** Was there an issue with Voter ID job change do you think?

[redacted]**:** Thinks there was something around to do around the change of/additional duties. The number of bereavements just wasn't credible. There was a spread of people who dropped out before or after training but most had gone out before being trained. The challenge was in getting people who signed up late into training. Information officers and clerks got the same fee, presiding officer is obviously a higher rate.

[redacted]**:** Were you able to carry over Voter ID trained staff from recall petition to the by election?

[redacted]**:** We did and we focused on doing that. There's probably something about the amount of time between getting people signed up and then letters going out. It's the formal letter that seems to be the trigger point for people dropping out.

[redacted] **moves us on to Voter ID. Did you get a large number of queries on Voter ID? What was the impact on the office.**

[redacted]**:** Think the majority went to the EROs office. Didn't seem to get a majority to the office or they went to the public queries line. I was surprised by the lack of queries. In that area they had already had the recall petition so they were probably quite well informed about the Voter ID requirements. We didn't have queries from candidates and agents and we ran information sessions which weren't that well attended.

[redacted]**: Further reflections on Voter ID? We note the numbers of ultimately turned away was low and in line with England in May.**

[redacted]**:** One of the candidates through a press enquiry said there was a problem at one polling station where a lot of people got turned away. We went to the named polling station and the problem wasn't what was described and so not sure where that was being reported.

[redacted]**: Did staff suffer abuse/words on Voter ID**

[redacted]**:** We definitely had some reports of elector behaviour towards polling station staff. But it wasn't a wide spread problem. One report of police having to speak to an elector but that wasn't followed up as a prosecution. Think it was related to being turned away at 9:30 pm making it harder for them to vote.

[redacted]**: Was this specifically discussed in the training?**

[redacted]**:** Staff were warned in the training that this new policy was in place and that some voters were not happy about it. Thought it was fair to give warning but not a major focus of the training- maybe ten seconds or so. We also have a feedback form available at all polling stations which staff found it a good method of deflecting the frustration away from individual members of polling station staff. We've done this for some time it wasn't related to Voter ID. The electors do have the opportunity to put personal details to respond to specific concerns but they tend to be anonymised.

Screens?

[redacted]**:** No requests for privacy screens. None. We tried to have female polling staff at all polling stations. Where we couldn't, we had two female PSIs who could go to the polling stations where required. We are aided by having a contained urban space so it wasn't a problem when it came to staffing.

[redacted]**:** On data collection, it was much easier to do the record keeping and reporting on the one day rather than the challenges we had with the recall. We had the information officers there and didn't ensure they collected all the data so that may have been a failing for us ([redacted] points out that this was problem across May- collecting Voter ID data to those who turned away and left before being caught at a desk.

From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: Catch up on by-election

Hi [redacted]

List of questions is below Obviously you can ignore the questions on processing voter authority certificates as that's for the EROs And where 'greeters' are mentioned, read that as 'voter information officers'

Cheers

[redacted]

How much of a problem, if at all, did you and your authority have with:

Processing and issuing Voter Authority Certificate applications?

Answer:

Producing and issuing Temporary Voter Authority Certificates?

Answer:

Do you have any comments you'd like to make on implementing the Voter Authority Certificate system?

This may include:
Providing information to electors on the Voter Authority Certificate
Dealing with applications for the Voter Authority Certificate
Difficulties electors may have faced in applying, any ways in which you enabled applications for a Voter Authority Certificate
Managing volume of work resulting from applications generally, in particular around the deadline, and providing them in time for polling day
Managing the provision of Temporary Voter Authority Certificates
Comments on performance of the Electoral Registration Officer Portal (EROP) in managing Voter Authority Certificate applications/processing

Answer:

How much of a problem, if at all, did you and your authority have with staffing the polls?

This may include:
Recruiting for the core team
Recruiting polling station staff
Training polling station staff
Retaining polling station staff between recruitment and polling day

Answer:

In the month or months prior to polling day, how manageable was it for your authority to deal with the volume of public queries received in relation to Voter Identification?

E g acceptable forms of ID, Voter Authority Certificate applications, etc

Answer:

And how manageable were these public queries on polling day?

Answer:

Part two: Voter ID requirements

The following set of questions/discussion are focused on hearing your experiences on Voter ID requirements

We're interested in any awareness work you conducted around voter ID, and what you would be likely to repeat Which actions that you took, if any, did you find most effective in your work to ensure voters knew about the need to provide photo ID to vote?

This may include: Electoral Commission resources, Social media activity, Materials produced by the council, Promotion of options in household notification letter (HNL), Work with political parties, Council website, Local media, Partnering with local organisations to raise awareness e g community groups, any other action

Answer:

Which actions that you took, if any, did you find most effective in your work to ensure voters knew that they could apply for a Voter Authority Certificate that they were unable to provide photo ID to vote?

This may include: Electoral Commission resources, Social media activity, Materials produced by the council, Promotion of options in household notification letter (HNL), Work with political parties, Council website, Local media, Partnering with local organisations to raise awareness e g community groups, any other action

Answer:

We'd like to hear more about the impact of the Voter ID requirements on voters- do you have any comments on the requirement for polling station voters to show appropriate voter ID?

This should include:
The experience of electors who had difficulty showing ID and/or were turned away, and electors who returned to vote after initially being turned away;
Provisions and processes for electors to show ID in private such as identifying suitable areas in polling stations, provision/use of privacy screens, employing female staff in stations to assist with ID checks;
Any issues with checking ID in private causing delays to processing electors

Answer:

Did you use Greeters in any of your polling stations? How helpful was this?

Answer:

Do you have any comments on the staff experience of identifying and recording electors turned away for reasons liked to ID, in particular completing the Ballot Paper Refusal Form (BPRL) and Voter ID Notes sheet and completing the Voter ID Enquiry Form (VIDEF)

Answer:

In supplying figures on turned away electors, did your authority attempt to combine figures collected via the forms at the desk with any unofficial figures collected by greeters at the door?

Answer:

How confident would you say you are in your authority's capability to deliver the voter ID requirement at a poll with a higher turnout, for example as part of a UK Parliamentary General Election?

This could be understood as:
Very confident
Fairly confident
Not very confident
Not at all confident
Don't know/Not applicable

Answer:

Do you have any other comments or issues relating to voter ID, including any comments around funding to implement these measures?

Answer:

Part three: Accessibility

The Electoral Commission would like to know the steps that you took to assist disabled people to vote at elections

In addition to informing reporting on the by-election, your responses will help us to identify wider issues such as whether our guidance needs to be revised, or if changes to legislation for future polls should be sought, or whether the funding approach needs to be improved

Did you meet the minimum requirements as set out in Electoral Commission guidance on accessibility at all of your polling stations?

This question caused a bit of misunderstanding in the EA Survey, so at the bottom of this conversation guide is a table which captures all the equipment categorised by whether it's a must, should or could See Annex 1
It is also worth clarifying, if possible, whether the equipment was provided in all or just some polling stations

Answer:

How much of a problem, if at all, did you and your authority have with:

Booking polling station venues?

Answer:

Providing accessible polling stations in accordance with Electoral Commission Guidance)?

See question above if this triggers/causes confusion

Answer:

Sourcing/providing equipment to support accessibility (i e did any voters make requests for specific equipment)?

Answer:

Providing training for polling station staff on accessibility?

Answer:

Engaging with local disability groups and civil society organisations?

Answer:

How many advance requests did you receive from disabled electors for assistance/equipment at polling stations?

Answer:

What type of requests did you receive, and were you able to implement them?

Answer:

Did you have any specific training for polling station staff on accessibility?

No, Yes (training included in core polling station training), Yes (separate training provided)

Answer:

How confident did you and your team feel to support the accessibility requirements of disabled voters in polling stations?

Answer:

Do you have any comments or issues in relation to accessibility on polling day?

Such as the voting experience for individuals requiring assistance to vote at a polling station, and steps you took to provide reasonable equipment to enable, or make it easier for, disabled people to vote independently and in secret at the polling station

Answer:

Do you have any comments around funding to implement these measures?

Answer:

Did you take any other steps to assist disabled people to vote that we haven't covered in our discussion?

Answer:

Part four: Any other comments

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
To:
Cc:
Subject: RE: Post-by election wash up
Date: 09 November 2023 12:07:00

That's great [redacted]. I'll pop an invite over and copy the questions into that so you have it all in one place.
All the best
[redacted]

From: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk>
Sent: Thursday, November 9, 2023 10:33 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Cc: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>; [redacted]
[redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: RE: Post-by election wash up

Good morning [redacted],
No problem at all, I would be free on the morning of Tuesday 21 November. My diary is clear for that morning, so happy to meet at whatever time suits you all.
A list of questions would be very helpful if available so that I can ensure all details are to hand during the meeting.
I look forward to hearing from you.
Kind regards,
[redacted]

From: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, November 8, 2023 5:10 PM
To: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk>
Cc: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>; [redacted]
[redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: Post-by election wash up

Hi [redacted]
Hope you are well and have no further electoral events lurking on the horizon.
I was wondering whether we could grab some time in your diary w/c 20 November to have a quick wash up meeting on the by-election? This would be to inform our reporting.
We're taking a really light touch approach to reporting with a focus really just on voter ID and accessibility (the main changes in the EA Act in force at the time of your by-election). You can see examples from the July by-elections on our website here.
My colleague [redacted] (cc'd above) is co-ordinating the reporting across all the by-elections in the UK but [redacted] and I would also like to join.
We are reasonably flexible on timing as long as we can start by 2.30pm Monday, Wednesday, Thursday that week ([redacted] is part time and finishes at 3.30pm). We can also do the Tuesday in the morning. We would do the meeting over Teams.
Can you let me know if a particular time suits for you? If helpful I can send you over a list of questions in advance so you can see what we want to pick up on.
Promise not to contact you again in the next few months if you can help with this!!
All the best
[redacted]

[redacted]
The Electoral Commission
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk

Press office: 0131 225 0211
Press out of hours: 07789 920414

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From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk; [redacted]
Subject: Publication of stats on voter ID at R&HW by-election
Date: 09 January 2024 08:42:48

Morning [redacted]
Just wanted to make you aware that we have now updated our UK Parliament by-elections page to include the statistics from the Rutherglen & Hamilton West by-election.
I have noticed that the proportion of voters initially turned away through lack of ID is a bit higher than in the other by-elections which took place last year (while still a relatively small proportion of total voters). I did get a query from [redacted] from the [redacted] about the stats back in November and said we would be publishing in due course so he might pick this up again.
Ultimately, those voters at the by-elections in England will have seen all the TV advertising we carried out ahead of English local elections in May last year so it's not surprising that there was a lower rate of voters turned away there. Given the absence of TV advertising in your area, it's actually quite impressive what was achieved through social media and partnership work. We'll obviously be running TV advertising across Scotland when the UKPGE gets called so this should help have an impact for that poll.
Let me know if any questions.
All the best

[redacted]
The Electoral Commission
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk

Press office: 0131 225 0211
Press out of hours: 07789 920414

From: [redacted]
To:
Subject: RE: Number turned away at the by-election
Date: 11 December 2023 09:23:40
Attachments: image001.jpg
image002.png

Hi [redacted]
I can confirm that those figures are correct. Let me know if you need anything else from me.
Kind regards,

[redacted]
South Lanarkshire Council
Almada Street
Hamilton ML3 0AA
Phone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]@sou hlanarkshire.gov.uk
A person standing next to a box Description automatically generated

From [redacted]@electoralcommission org.uk>
Sent: Thursday, December 7, 2023 10:24 AM
To: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk>
Subject: Number turned away at the by-election

Hi [redacted]
Just a very quick double check below are the numbers we have for your By-election around the number turned away. I think the below are correct but just because we did not ask for them in a standard format and also they are quite high thought I would just double check.. Please can you confirm..

	Number turned away	Number returned	Polling station voters	Proportion turned away	Proportion permanently turned away	Proportion returned	Number of candidates	Turnout	Electorate
Rutherglen and Hamilton West	298	199	20,177	1.47%	0.49%	67%	14	37.2%	82,104

Many thanks,

[redacted]
The Electoral Commission

electoralcommission.org.uk

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From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: By-elections
Date: 07 December 2023 11:19:02

Cheers [redacted].
As I mentioned elsewhere, [redacted] is following up on the Scotland number.
I agree that the table in the main body of he text might be a nice addition.
I also agree that we may want to highlight in the body of he text, perhaps at the end, our concerns around future data collection.
I should also flag that I cannot for he life of me find the write up of mid-beds. It's utterly bizarre because, as you can see, I write those notes up in the meeting. I've asked Heather for any of her notes and will take another look.
[redacted]

From [redacted]@electoralcommission org.uk>
Sent: Thursday, December 7, 2023 9:52 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>; [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: RE: By-elections

Morning folks,
Thanks so much, [redacted], for sharing the notes and the data – really interesting to read about their experience at the by-elections. Agree wi h you that there isn't anything new/different in those conversations to warrant separate inclusion in he text, both in relation to voter ID and accessibility.
Apart from updating the overall percentages in the text (and adding the separate accordions), I wonder whether we might want to have a table in the main body of the text that collates the key stats at a glance in one place, like you did below? I think that could help give a bit of context to the overall percentages of those who turned away/never returned.
Also, would we want to reflect anywhere the fact that the government has rejected our recommendation around collecting data at future elections? Writing this down for now so I don't forget, but we can chat properly tomorrow.
Thanks,
[redacted]

The Electoral Commission
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk

From [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, December 6, 2023 3 09 PM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>; [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: By-elections

Hey folks,
Notes from the calls below, as well as the data.
We'll catch up on Friday but as mentioned elsewhere, as much as I'd like to add new text from some of the interviews, I'm not convinced that we have enough to go on. Obviously the overall percentages in the body of the text will need updating.
You'll also note the turned away numbers in Rutherglen and Hamilton West are higher than elsewhere, including the next highest Uxbridge. I've shared this with [redacted] and [redacted] is going to field any queries she has on that.
Any questions, let me know.

[redacted]

- Rutherglen and Hamilton West
- Tamworth
- Mid Bedfordshire (I cannot for the life of me find the write up of this conversation so bare with- will send round once I find it… very bizarre!)

From [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2023 9:34 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: By-election numbers

Hi [redacted]
Below is a grid of all the by-election numbers that I think you need (have included the ones have already given you so you can see the comparison). Let me know if you think anything is missing.
Overall not much difference but you can see that he Scotland by-election did have more people turned away due to the ID provision.

	Number turned away	Number returned	Polling station voters	Proportion turned away	Proportion permanatly turned away	Proportion returned	Number of candidates	Turnout	Electorate
Tamworth	42	26	16594	0 25%	0.10%	62%	9	36.0%	71,302
Mid bedfordshire	164	102	29966	0.55%	0.21%	62%	13	44.1%	92,578
Rutherglen and Hamilton West	298	199	20177	1.47%	0.49%	67%	14	37.2%	82,104
Somerst and Frome	189	130	27923	0.68%	0.21%	69%	8	44.2%	87,921
Uxbridge and South Ruislip	256	173	22287	1.15%	0.37%	68%	17	46.2%	67,067
Selby and Ainsty	88	66	23432	0.38%	0.09%	75%	13	44.8%	80,150
Total	**1037**	**696**	**140379**	**0.74%**	**0.21%**	**67%**			
Total 1st set of by-elec ions	533	369	73642	0.72%	0.22%	69%			
Total 2nd set of by elec ions	504	327	66737	0.75%	0.26%	65%			

Thanks,
[redacted]

Senior Research Officer
[redacted]
The Electoral Commission

electoralcommission.org.uk

From: [redacted]
To:
Subject: RE: By-election numbers
Date: 07 December 2023 10:15:52

Hey [redacted]
Yeah I hear ya.
If you had time, a double check would be grand.
Appreciate it.
[redacted]
...will see about the link. Annoying.

From [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Thursday, December 7, 2023 10:14 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: RE: By-election numbers

Hi [redacted],
Yes, you are right the proportion of polling station voters turned away was relatively high in Rutherglen and Hamilton West.
I guess given that it's the only election that's taken place in Scotland since the introduction of voter ID for elections then not a huge surprise that the proportion turned away should be higher.
I guess in the grand scheme of things 298 people being turned away and 199 returning might not seem like that many.. It is slightly less than half a percent of polling station voters been turned away... This compared with the local elections if recorded for a local authority would have put it with roughly 20 local authorities with a larger proportion permanently turned away.. I guess it depends on what their expectations were..
If you are like I could just double check the figures with the local au hority. They provide data in a non-standard output so it is just about possible that I have taken the wrong figure.. I don't think so as they have added up the number already to 298 and am sure about he 199 returning (which seems about right given the number turned away).
The link to the supporting interview does not work for me (I guess something to do with the transfer to ecco).
Thanks,
[redacted]
Senior Research Officer
[redacted]
The Electoral Commission

electoralcommission.org.uk

From [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Thursday, December 7, 2023 9:45 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: RE: By-election numbers

Hey [redacted],
Quick question- he Rutherglen and Hamilton West turned away number seems pretty high, and on a pretty low turnout.
Do you know what that's about?
Obviously we have the supporting interview but the RO didn't talk to Voter ID being a major issue...
[redacted]

From [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2023 9:34 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: By-election numbers

Hi [redacted]
Below is a grid of all the by-election numbers that I think you need (have included the ones have already given you so you can see the comparison). Let me know if you think anything is missing.
Overall not much difference but you can see that he Scotland by-election did have more people turned away due to the ID provision.

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Total	**1037**	**696**	**140379**	**0.74%**	**0.21%**	**67%**			
Total 1st set of by-elec ions	533	369	73642	0.72%	0.22%	69%			
Total 2nd set of by elec ions	504	327	66737	0.75%	0.26%	65%			

Thanks,
[redacted]
Senior Research Officer
[redacted]
The Electoral Commission

electoralcommission.org.uk

From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: FW: Rutherglen and Hamilton West By-election 5 October 2023
Date: 23 October 2023 09:32:29
Attachments: image001.jpg
image002.png
Voter Identification Data Gathered.xlsx

Hi [redacted]
See attached for the data.
Not sure what figures you will use for calculating 'turned away' rates for voter ID but you can get the results data here: Rutherglen and Hamilton West By-election results - South Lanarkshire Council
If we take the number of people of people turned away as a % of those who actually voted (whether by post or in person) then it's about 1% for people initially turned away and then 0.3% for those who did not subsequently return with the right ID.
Obviously if we take it as a % of in-person voters it will be **way** higher but we would need to get additional data from the RO on the numbers of PVs included in the count to calculate how many in-person voters there were.
Happy to discuss if helpful.
[redacted]

From: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, October 18, 2023 11:00 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Cc: [redacted]@levellingup.gov.uk>
Subject: Rutherglen and Hamilton West By-election 5 October 2023
Good afternoon,
With reference to the By-election for the Rutherglen and Hamilton West Constituency, polling for which took place on 5 October 2023, please find attached the data collected by the polling stations in respect of the ID requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022.
Please let me know if there is any further information which I can provide you with.
Kind regards,

[redacted]
South Lanarkshire Council
Almada Street
Hamilton ML3 0AA
Phone: [redacted]

A person standing next to a box Description automatically generated

signature_1053430703

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From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: By-election today
Date: 18 October 2023 10:06:00
Attachments: image001.jpg
image002.png

Morning [redacted]
An Excel spreadsheet would be grand.
Thanks
[redacted]

From: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, October 18, 2023 8:54 AM
To: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Subject: RE: By-election today

Good morning [redacted],
I have now collated the statistical information regarding Voter ID from our Polling Stations and was looking for clarification on how this should best be supplied to the Electoral Commission.
I see from the guidance on last year's English elections that there was a portal for providing this information, but I don't seem to have any login details for this. Could you give me some clarity on this please – I have the data on an excel spreadsheet which I based upon the one provided for the recall Petition so could provide that to you if that would suffice.
Kind regards,

[redacted]
South Lanarkshire Council
Almada Street
Hamilton ML3 0AA
Phone: [redacted]

A person standing next to a box Description automatically generated

signature_1053430703

From: [redacted]@electoralcommission.org.uk>
Sent: Thursday, October 5, 2023 12:29 PM
To: [redacted]@southlanarkshire.gov.uk>
Subject: By-election today

Hi [redacted].
I hope the day is going well for you and your staff.
I just wanted to make you are that we will be popping into some polling places today. [redacted] will be in Rutherglen and Cambuslang this afternoon and I will be in Hamilton and Blantyre this evening and I intend to observe the count for the first hour or so (as I need to get up to Dundee tonight).
All the best
[redacted]

[redacted]
The Electoral Commission
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk

Press office: 0131 225 0211
Press out of hours: 07789 920414

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