

Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP  
Presiding Officer  
Convener of the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
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28 September 2023

Dear Presiding Officer

**Electoral Commission estimate submission to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body for financial year 2024/25**

I am pleased to enclose the Commission's Annual Estimate for the 2024/25 financial year in relation to our devolved Scottish activities. Our estimate is underpinned by our [five year Corporate Plan for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27](#). This year's estimate is £2.258m.

As you would expect, the estimate and accompanying information sets out how we plan to manage our work effectively in Scotland during 2024/25. The Corporate Plan sets out five strategic objectives for the period, which seek to maintain the high standards and public trust in the electoral system, as well as to address pressures and areas for development to further enhance the strength of democracy in Scotland and the wider UK. Though the forthcoming year does not feature devolved elections, the importance of our work across our stakeholder groups continues, as the following information will illustrate.

In submitting this estimate, we can confirm that the estimated level of income and expenditure is consistent with the economical, efficient and effective exercise by the Commission of its devolved Scottish functions. The increase on the 2023/24 estimate is primarily driven by necessary investments to improve technology, including enhancements to cyber security, and to address issues of capacity and capability across a number of key services in the Commission. Further detail on key investment drivers is provided below.

## Our proposed work programme in 2024/25

### Enabling voter confidence and engagement

We will continue to work across a number of fronts to promote public confidence in Scotland in the electoral system. We are continually developing and extending our

provision of accurate information to voters through our website and other channels, to ensure that it provides accessible information to support them to participate in the democratic process. Between elections, we work to develop new advertising based on the latest insights, to drive up rates of electoral registration.

Our programme of political literacy and engagement work – begun in Scotland and now implemented across the UK – continues to expand the range of political literacy resources available for young people and educators. This work forms an increasingly important part of our ongoing work to increase youth engagement in democracy, raising understanding of the democratic process with the aim of effecting a steady, profound change to engagement levels.

In the next year, we will build on this work, establishing a long-term youth voice programme. Our new partner, Children in Scotland, will be gathering insights from a diverse group of young people from across Scotland to inform our education and engagement work. We will work to further embed democratic education in schools and youth work settings by supporting youth workers, teachers of PSE (Personal and Social Education) and other subjects to use our resources through teacher networks and training. We will also explore how we can work with public sector and civil society organisations to support care experienced young people and BSL users to learn about their vote.

Looking ahead to the 2027 Scottish council elections, we will lead a project to identify strategies for improving voter understanding of the single transferable vote system (STV), with the aim of lowering the level of rejected ballots at Scottish council elections. This will include qualitative research with voters to test new informational resources on STV.

### **Informing the development of reforms**

We are currently supporting the Scottish Government's electoral reform agenda, providing expert advice and constructive challenge to ensure that proposals can deliver successfully for voters, administrators and campaigners. This will continue for any new proposals for electoral legislation which arise from the forthcoming electoral reform bill. We will provide expert advice to both Government and Parliament to ensure that any proposed changes are evidence-based, workable and deliver for voters, campaigners and electoral administrators. We will also develop new guidance resources for electoral administrators and campaigners to support them to comply with any new requirements arising from the legislation.

Our work in this area is supported by the significant evidence base we develop through our programme of work on electoral modernisation, including the research we continue to conduct with the public and electoral administrators. Our ongoing research programme ensures our advice is based on an up-to-date understanding of public attitudes, to underpin the development of policy proposals for further modernisation.

### **Supporting the delivery of well-run elections**

We continue to support Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers to deliver high-quality services to voters. This includes the provision of advice and guidance, and supporting and challenging their performance against our published standards. We will

work with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland to support Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers, to address the significant concerns about the resilience of electoral services in Scotland, and help them meet the challenges they face in delivering well-run electoral services which continue to meet voters' needs. This includes managing the increasing complexities of the divergence between the rules for reserved and devolved elections.

### Engaging regulatory and wider stakeholders

We will continue to build on our work in supporting the regulated community in Scotland to comply with electoral law. This includes bespoke advice and guidance resources so that parties and campaigners can easily understand the political finance laws, regardless of their size or experience. We have expanded the range of support available, and continue to provide transparency for the public on political finance in Scotland by publishing the details of donations, loans and annual party accounts. We monitor compliance with political finance law and will take proportionate enforcement action where necessary.

Finally, we will continue to work with other statutory bodies and our established networks, including the EMB and the Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel to understand how we can best support our wider stakeholders and the challenges they face. We will also explore new opportunities to inform MSPs about our work, including by providing drop-in sessions in Parliament and briefings on areas of work which MSPs have expressed an interest in.

### Value for money

The Commission is committed to ensuring efficient and effective use of funding. To achieve this, we focus on several key areas of work, including procurement, contract management, performance management, and effective prioritisation.

Proposed budgets for the Commission as previously set out in the Corporate Plan have been updated to reflect inflationary pressures affecting the UK. The Commission's ability to demonstrate value for money hinges on its ability to optimise procurement practices, manage contracts efficiently, manage risks, monitor and improve performance, and make informed decisions about resource allocation through effective prioritisation.

The Commission will seek to ensure that we are not only fulfilling our objectives but also doing so in a cost-effective and efficient manner, ultimately driving gains in public value.

With regard to the proposed bid for funding, the same funding formula has been applied as in the previous year, to support the equitable division of costs between the three parliaments. The Commission's core costs for shared activity – such as the ongoing support to voters, administrators and the regulated community, as well as the corporate costs necessary for the operation of the Commission – are allocated on a formula based on population estimates. The allocation to Scotland is typically 8%. Costs where there is an additional demand on Commission functions to meet needs specific to Scottish stakeholders, or where the activity is solely attributable to Scottish devolved functions, these are allocated between 12% and 100%.

**Commented [SM1]:** Have added in to pick up on Craig's point that this work goes on year round, even when no election and it all costs money. Once agreed this could read across to Wales letter

Despite high inflation for the past 18 months, including a level of 6.8% CPI (Consumer Price Index) in July 2023, we will continue to seek to mitigate inflation wherever possible in our non-pay commercial costs.

## Key investment drivers

We can confirm that the Scottish Parliament's proposed contribution will be an increase of £326,000 compared with the funding for period 2023/24. This is largely made up from investment in the following areas:

### **Cyber security**

The discovery of a sophisticated cyber-attack on the Commission has underlined the need to keep pace with the latest cyber security technology. The UK's democratic process and its institutions remain a target for hostile actors online. Cyber security enhancements continue into 2024/25, and form a significant part of the increased investment we are seeking. The proportion of these costs in relation to the Scottish Parliament's budget are £107,000.

### **Delivering value for money and building a skilled and diverse workforce**

To deliver value for money we will be investing in procurement including staffing to drive improved standards in commercial transactions and develop our internal financial budgeting and monitoring functions. This includes expanding our internal audit services and absorbing increased fees from our external auditors, the National Audit Office, following increased testing during the 2022/23 closure of accounts.

We will also be investing in our human resources functions to improve data collection and monitoring on equality, diversity and inclusion to inform our recruitment and staff retention processes, and to develop the learning and development opportunities for our workforce.

The costs related to these investments, as attributable to the Scottish Parliament, are £83,000.

### **Delivering electoral reform**

Given the upcoming electoral reform bill in the Scottish Parliament, we are investing in increased capacity across our Scotland, policy, legal, research and regulation functions. This will ensure we can provide expert advice to Government, Parliament and the regulated community to manage the impact of increasing divergence between the rules for Scottish devolved elections and reserved elections. The total costs attributable to the Scottish Parliament for this investment are £76,000.

### **Pay award**

Assumptions for the pay award in 2024/25 and inflation reflected in contracts are at £88,000, based on the assumption of a 5% increase being agreed.

The above is offset in part by a reduction of £28,000 due to changes in the total value of assets charged to the 2024/25 year.

As in the previous year, the Scottish Government can request advice and assistance from the Commission on specific electoral related matters. This would be in addition to the funding provided by the Scottish Parliament.

## Measuring performance

We identified improvements to benefit the public, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and parliaments throughout our Corporate Plan, and we aim to measure how well we realise these improvements using a range of indicators/measures. We use a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, to drive continuous improvements in our procedures and skills.

Our corporate performance indicators sit alongside a group which show the health of the electoral system as a whole. These enable a 'health check' to help guide actions by ourselves and others. Working with these others – including elected members, governments, campaigners and parties, through to electoral administrators and the police - we make key contributions that enable a sound democratic system. Our performance indicators are set out in our Corporate Plan and our Annual Report details our progress against them in each year.

By default, performance and system data will be collected at the level of the four parts of the UK in support of the accountability for our work.

We commend the enclosed Estimate for the financial year 2024/25 to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body and look forward to discussing it with you when appropriate.



**Dame Sue Bruce DBE**  
Electoral Commissioner, Scotland



**Shaun McNally CBE**  
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer