

Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP
Presiding Officer
Convener of the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

14 September 2022

Dear Presiding Officer

Electoral Commission estimate Submission to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body for financial year 2023/24

I am pleased to enclose the Estimate Memorandum which includes the Commission's Main Estimate for the 2023/24 financial year in relation to its devolved Scottish activities. Our estimate is underpinned by our [five year Corporate Plan for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27](#) which was provided to you last year. This year's estimate is £1.93m, £0.09m lower than 2022/23 mainly due to no planned elections during 2023/24.

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.

As you would expect, the estimate and accompanying information sets out how we plan to manage our work effectively in Scotland during 2023/24. The Corporate Plan sets out five strategic objectives for the period. These 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.

Before turning to the background to next year's estimate, we are giving you early indication that we will likely need to make a supplementary estimate to you in November 2022. While we are still finalising the precise figures, we think this is likely to be in the region of £0.240m. This is due to salary awards and higher than budgeted costs regarding the public awareness campaign for the 2022 council elections campaign.

Background to the estimate - our strategic objectives

Our five strategic objectives for the period April 2022 to March 2027 are:

- accessible registration and voting
- transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance

- resilient local electoral services
- fair and effective electoral law
- a modern and sustainable electoral system

Work undertaken in the 2022/23 financial year focussed on supporting the successful delivery of the Scottish council elections. We provided advice and guidance to, and monitored the performance of, Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers and supported electoral administrators and the regulated community. We also ran a programme of public awareness and education activity to support voters to register and know how to cast their vote. This included the launch of new educational resources to support political literacy in schools. We also recently published our [report on the May 2022 Scottish council elections](#) in September, and this outlined recommendations for future elections in Scotland.

Our work programme in 2023 / 24

As there are no scheduled elections in the 2023/24 financial year, as well as continuing to provide support at any by-elections, the Commission's work in Scotland will focus on three key areas.

Supporting electoral reform

We will support the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament on considering any new proposals for electoral legislation which arise from the forthcoming Scottish Government consultation on electoral reform. We will provide expert advice to both Government and Parliament to ensure that any proposed changes are workable and deliver for voters, campaigners and electoral administrators. This will be supported by the findings from our own programme of work in considering electoral modernisation, including the research we have conducted with the public and electoral administrators.

We will continue our programme of work to ensuring ensure there is sufficient resource and resilience within the electoral community. The Electoral Commission is working with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB) and the wider electoral community across the UK to discuss and identify solutions to the staffing, resilience and capacity challenges experienced by Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their teams. An immediate focus is addressing the challenges of recruiting on polling station staff.

Political literacy and engagement

In the coming financial year we plan to invest in staff resource to ensure that we are able to build our democratic engagement work in every year, regardless of whether there is a devolved election. This will enable us and our partners to target newly enfranchised voters who may recently have come of voting age or are newly settled in Scotland, instead of waiting to reach them ahead of a relevant scheduled election.

We will continue to develop our education programme to ensure that voters – especially those that are newly enfranchised – are aware of their democratic rights. This work will

evolve over the next year, and we will be engaging further with young people and educators across Scotland to progress several new initiatives. For educators, we will develop new lesson plans linked to the Curriculum for Excellence and provide accompanying teacher training. We will work closely with Education Scotland to ensure these resources can effectively support the delivery of democratic education in schools.

We will continue to work with youth organisations to gain feedback from young people on our education work. This includes ensuring that young people work with us to co-design our youth materials. The engagement with these young people support us in planning events and activities for our annual Welcome to Your Vote Week which will take place in January 2023.

We will also be working to implement the recommendation from our 2022 Scottish council elections report in supporting voters to better understand how to vote using the STV system. This will include working with specific authorities where there are higher than average rejection rates in some wards to trial targeted public awareness activity in those wards.

The Commission in Scotland will embed work to increase registration amongst under-registered groups outside of election periods. Existing partnerships will be maintained and strengthened through ongoing collaboration, and the Commission will scope opportunities for new partnerships to reach under-registered groups.

Regulatory support

We will continue to provide ongoing support to the regulated community in line with our regulatory support strategy. Our approach has been informed and led by the evidence and feedback we received in our most recent survey of the regulated community. We will continue to focus on delivering more bespoke advice and guidance resources so that parties and campaigners can easily understand the political finance laws, regardless of their size or experience.

We aim to provide further one to one support via surgeries and meetings with parties, to help them better understand the guidance in order to comply with the law, and we will further develop our guidance materials, ensuring they meet the demands of both the regulated community and the changing electoral environment.

Finally, we will continue to work with other statutory bodies and our established networks, including the Electoral Management Board for Scotland 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 look to develop our relationship further with MSPs, including the Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee so that they can fully understand our work in Scotland and how they can engage further with the Commission.

We commend the enclosed Estimate for the financial year 2023/24 to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body and look forward to discussing them with you when appropriate.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Bruce". The letters are cursive and connected.

Dame Sue Bruce OBE
Electoral Commissioner, Scotland

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shaun McNally". The signature is highly stylized and cursive.

Shaun McNally CBE
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer