The Highland Council	Agenda Item	17
Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee **12 September 2013**	Report No	CPE 41/13

Highland Elections – Encouraging Participation / Increasing Turnout

Report by the Chief Executive

SUMMARY

This report provides members with an up-date of the actions to encourage participation in elections, particularly for young people.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   At the meeting of the Committee held on 6 December, 2012 an Action Plan for encouraging participation in elections was agreed. This Report advises the Committee of the work undertaken by the Election Team and the development of a number of work streams.

1.2   The Work Plan listing the key activities during 2013 / 14 forms the Appendix 1 to this Report.

2.0   LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

2.1   The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee is investigating a number of matters relating to the 2012 Scottish local government elections, with a view to making recommendations for improvement or change to the Scottish Government.

2.2   The matters investigated are:
► Voter Turnout and how this can be increased
► Voter Registration and how this can be increased
► Proxy Voting including postal voting
► The terminology used in and around elections
► Reasons why people do not vote
► Robson Rotation in respect of the ordering of the ballot paper
► Diversity amongst voters and elected representatives including any matters associated with the eligibility to stand, donations and the nomination process
► The timing of future elections with a view to minimising clashes.

2.3   The Committee Reporters have now reported back to the Committee with its findings and its Report and recommendations can be found at

2.4   The Report has put forward 18 recommendations to the Scottish Government. The Government's response is expected in Autumn 2013 and will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

3.0   FEEDBACK FROM THE CITIZENS' PANEL

3.1   In 2011 and 2012 we asked members of our Citizens' Panel about their experience of voting and satisfaction with arrangements for voting. This has shown generally high levels of satisfaction and participation. No voting experience questions were asked this year as no Highland-wide elections had taken place.

3.2   Each year we also ask for views on the extent to which the Council demonstrates certain qualities. From a list of 13 qualities, those relating to the democratic nature of the Council could be seen as:

- Tells local people what it is doing;
- Treats all residents fairly;
- Is aware of people's needs;
- Listens to local people;
- Represents your views;
- Involves people in how it spends money.

3.3   Panel members are asked to say whether they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree whether we demonstrate these qualities. The results from the 2013 survey are shown in Appendix 2, along with the net scores[1] for 2011 and 2012. With over 1000 Panel members responding to this question, the results can be generalized to the adult population as a whole with high levels of confidence.

3.4   On balance we are viewed positively on first four qualities listed above and with improving scores since 2012 in five out of six qualities. However more people disagree than agree that we represent their views (-1 net score) and that we involve people in how we spend money (-11 score). Of all 13 qualities we ask about, these are the only two with negative scores in 2013. It is worth noting that a sizeable proportion (between 33% and 50%) neither agree nor disagree across all six qualities.

3.5   There are interesting differences in views from different groups in the community. For example:

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[1] The net score is calculated by adding the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' scores and subtracting the 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' scores. For the full report produced by the UHI Centre for Remote and Rural Studies see
http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/howyourcouncilperforms/

- Younger adults (under 24 years old) are more likely to view us positively in telling local people what we are doing and in treating all residents fairly.

- People with disabilities tend to view us less positively on telling local people what we are doing; being aware of people's needs and treating all residents fairly; although for all of these qualities scores are still positive. On balance people with disabilities views us negatively on listening to local people, representing their views and involving people in how we spend money.

- Newer residents (those living here for less than 5 years) on balance view us negatively on being aware of people's needs but are far more positive about us listening to local people.

- People who are unemployed and council tenants on balance view us positively in representing their views.

3.6 We also ask the Panel which are the five most important qualities for us to display. The results are shown on Appendix 3. Of the six qualities listed above, only 'listening to local people' is selected by a majority of the Panel as being in their top 5 most important qualities. 'Representing your views' is selected in the top 5 by only 19% of the Panel and is ranked 11th out of 13. This provides insight into the relative value the public place on these qualities

3.7 Younger people tend to give more importance to listening to local people, treating all residents fairly, being aware of people's needs and representing their views.

3.8 In terms of encouraging participation, some conclusions might be that:

- Younger voters may have higher expectations of being listened to, being treated fairly and feeling their views are represented. Our focus to encourage them to vote in elections should help towards their engagement.

- People with disabilities seem to feel more excluded. Promoting the accessibility of voting, as outlined in section 2 of this report, should be useful. When the full survey results are considered at the Council meeting in September, future actions to be considered include more engagement with groups representing people with disabilities.

- The Council's programme with a distinct theme on empowering communities should over time promote and enable better local engagement with perception scores continuing to improve.

4.0 SUPPORT IN POLLING STATIONS FOR THOSE WITH COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS OR DISABILITIES

4.1 At the last meeting of the Committee, members raised the issue of the degree of support given, in Polling Stations, to those electors who had communication needs or disabilities.

4.2 Everyone has the same rights to register and vote regardless of any disability. Local authorities have to comply with the Equality Act and other laws to make polling stations accessible for people with disabilities. Polling stations by law must be wheelchair accessible, and must provide copies of large print ballot papers and voting aids for visually impaired people.

4.3 Polling Places are currently assessed using the Electoral Commission's Accessibility Checklist and, where possible, only buildings which are accessible to people with a disability are used. However, given the geography of the Highlands, some premises, which are not accessible, are used. Responsibility for the designation of Polling Places lies with the Council and a statutory review of Polling Places will commence on 1 October 2013. This review is required by the Electoral Administration and Registration Act 2013 and subsequent reviews will be undertaken every fifth year thereafter.

4.4 All Polling Station staff are fully briefed on the setting up of a polling station for assisting disabled people and providing assistance for blind and partially sighted people entering a polling station.

4.5 Mostly all Polling Stations are equipped with:

- A ramp to provide easier access to the building for those with impaired mobility (eg wheelchair users);

- A polling booth suitable for wheelchair users;

- A large print ballot paper to assist partially sighted voters;

- A device to enable blind or partially sighted voters to vote unaided;

- It is also worth noting that a voter who cannot read or who may have a physical disability and who is unable to vote without assistance can be helped by a companion or by the staff within the Polling Station.

4.6 Facilities also exist for electors to vote by post or to appoint someone to vote on their behalf, should they so wish.

4.7 The Elections Team is currently working the Council's Equal Opportunities Officer to set up meetings with focus groups to discuss other ways of making voting more accessible in Highland.

4.8 In planning for elections equalities screenings will be carried out to identify any further action we might need to take to ensure that people with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged in the electoral process.

5.0 MOCK ELECTION

5.1 At the last meeting of the Committee, it was recommended that a Mock Election in a Secondary School should be arranged in late Spring 2014, rather than November 2014. It was noted at the Democracy in Schools Working Group that

those school pupils will in May 2014 be immersed in examinations and would not be therefore be involved in the lessons / preparation leading up to the mock election.

5.2   Following discussions among the Election Team, the Education, Culture and Sport Service and the Youth Development Officers of Highlife Highland, it was agreed that the Election Team would run a mock European Parliamentary Election in November 2013, in Nairn Academy for all pupils. The Youth Development Officers will also run a second mock European Parliamentary election with Grantown Grammar School S1, S2 and S3 pupils on 22 May 2014 (European Parliament Election day).

6.0   HIGHLAND YOUTH VOICE

6.1   The Election Team delivered a democracy session on 21 June 2013 at the Highland Youth Voice Conference in Sabhal Mhor Ostaig College, Sleat focussing on electoral participation. This conference was attended by 65 young people ranging from the ages of 14 to 17 years old. The young people were given an insight into the election process and split into groups to learn and shown: -

- the importance of registering to vote;
- how to register to vote;
- how to vote at a Polling Station with the setup of a mock polling station;
- how to apply for a postal vote or proxy.

6.2   Each group was asked their views and comments on the democratic process. The following questions were asked: If old enough, why do you vote/not vote?; what do you know about voting?; what would you like to know about voting?; what would encourage young people to vote? (candidates?, polling stations? What do you think re Electronic voting?); what needs to be improved?; what/who would make you want to vote?; do you feel well informed to vote?; and do you have enough info?

A representative from each group was then asked to summarise on film their group's views on the questions raised.

6.3   The key messages that emerged from the event were: -

- 76% of the young people did not agree that people should be able to vote online or by text message due to the reason that they felt it was not a secure method of voting due to people being able to hack into individual's online user accounts;

- 68% of the young people felt that voting should not be made compulsory. The young people felt having ownership to vote was important, whether they actually carried out the vote is there choice and by forcing people to vote many would question the democracy in a system like this.

- more work needs to be done in schools to make young people aware of the importance of voting;

- local Councillors need to have better contact with schools' pupils;

- Political Parties needed to be more proactive and educate voters in helping them choose who they should vote for.

6.4 It is recommended that further work be carried out in schools to identify what can and cannot be done to raise the importance of voting. The Council's Curriculum for Excellence Area Officer is currently working with secondary schools to find out what is being delivered on elections.

6.5 The Election Team have prepared a democracy pack and are in the process of scripting a short DVD which can be delivered to all schools in Highland and Youth Clubs. This DVD will be filmed by Highland Youth Voice representatives and relay the key messages to young people on what types of elections they can get involved in; explaining how to register to vote and how to vote at a polling station or by post.

7.0 UNIVERSITY OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

7.1 The Election Team is developing a plan with the Highlands and Islands University to engage students. Discussions have taken place with the Student Engagement Manager of the UHI and it was suggested that any key election information or dates should be published in the UHI's monthly newsletters to raise awareness to students.

7.2 It was suggested that "Democracy Ambassadors" should be appointed in November 2013. The role of the "Democracy Ambassador" is to alert students on the importance of registering to vote and thereafter encouraging people to vote. The Election Team will ensure that they are fully briefed on the importance of their role by delivering training sessions and they will also be recruited in schools using Highland Youth Voice representatives.

8.0 THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

8.1 Work has been undertaken by a range of stakeholders including the Electoral Commission, the Electoral Management Board (EMB), Education Scotland and School Leaders Scotland. This has resulted in a briefing paper designed to support young people in terms of **registering to vote and understanding how to vote in the Referendum**. The document aims to provide some initial guidance on ensuring young people understand the issues and are able to make an informed choice.

8.2 Education Scotland have now published the briefing paper which explores the place of political literacy within the Curriculum for Excellence. It relates to all settings where children and young people experience aspects of political literacy, either in an educational establishment such as college or school, or more broadly

in a wide range of community settings and forums. The briefing document can be found at:
http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CfEBriefing14_tcm4-813894.pdf

8.3   The arrangements for ensuring that those young people who will turn 16 on or before the day of the poll can register to vote are set out in the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Act 2013.

8.4   Young people will source a lot of their information about the referendum from the media, campaigners, their friends and family. However, there are certain aspects of the referendum, and how young people receive information about it, where it will be important for there to be a consistent approach that ensures they receive information in a clear, neutral and accessible way.

8.5   Registering young people is the responsibility of the Electoral Registration Officer.

8.6   The Electoral Commission will be running a mass public awareness campaign in the run up to the referendum in the summer of 2014. The campaign is expected to include TV, radio, and online advertising and an information booklet to every household in Scotland.

9.0   IMPLICATIONS

9.1   Resource Implications
There are will be specific resource implications arising from this report, but the additional work involved will be met from the existing Election team resources.

9.2   Risk Implications
Risks to low participation in elections are being addressed through the public awareness work of the Electoral Commission, the work of the ERO in ensuring those entitled to vote are registered and through the Council's action plan to support turn out at elections.

9.3   Legal Implications
There are specific legal implications arising from this report, in that the Council will be required to 'carry out and complete' reviews of polling districts and places in the period of 16 months beginning with 1st October 2013.

9.4   Equality Implications.
The focus on young people in the action plan is an attempt to engage them in the electoral process. Issues affecting people with disabilities are also highlighted in the report.

9.5   Climate Change/ Carbon Clever Implications
While voting on line or by text messaging has been discussed with young people, and this could reduce carbon emissions (less travel and paper used), this was not favoured by the majority in the straw poll conducted with HYV.

10.0. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 Members are asked to note:

1. the initiatives targeted at young people being carried out in partnership with Highlife Highland; Highland Youth Voice and UHI;

2. that Mock Elections will be carried out in Nairn Secondary School in November 2013 and in Grantown Grammar School in May 2014;

3. the issues dealt with in the Local Government and Regeneration Committee of the Scottish Parliament and the results of the Citizens' Panel survey in 2013 on their perception of the democratic qualities of the Council;

4. that a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations will be carried out on 1 October 2013;

5. that elections equalities screenings will be carried out to identify any further action that may need to be taken to ensure that people with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged in the electoral process.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 03 September 2013

Author: John Bruce, Elections Manager

Background Papers:–

Scottish Parliament Local Government and Regeneration Committee Papers
http://tiny.cc/3y85ww

Scottish Parliament Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee Papers
http://tiny.cc/cw85ww

Hansard Society: Audit of Political Engagement 10
http://tiny.cc/dx85ww

Extract from the Report of the Highland Council's Annual Survey of Performance and Attitudes 2013
Respondent's Views on whether the Highland Council meets the stated qualities

Qualities	2013					Difference between % who agree and % who disagree in 2013	Difference between % who agree and % who disagree in 2012	Difference between % who agree and % who disagree in 2011
	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %			
Maintains good quality local services	10	54	26	8	2	**54**	**51**	**52**
Is approachable	11	48	34	6	1	**52**	**49**	**56**
Is helpful	8	46	37	8	1	**45**	**45**	**46**
Is environmentally friendly	7	46	38	7	2	**44**	**45**	**39**
Is a fair employer	7	26	62	4	1	**28**	**27**	**26**
Tells local people what it is doing	**7**	**37**	**33**	**19**	**4**	21	9	15
Treats all residents fairly	**6**	**30**	**45**	**16**	**3**	17	5	7
Is aware of people's needs	**4**	**29**	**47**	**16**	**4**	13	6	17
Provides value for money	5	28	44	18	5	**10**	**3**	**8**
Listens to local people	**6**	**30**	**35**	**23**	**7**	6	9	11
Is efficient	5	26	43	21	5	**5**	**-1**	**4**
Represents your views	**3**	**21**	**50**	**18**	**7**	-1	-7	-2
Involves people in how it spends its money	**5**	**20**	**39**	**29**	**7**	-11	-18	0.3

N= 1,107 to 1,128

Extract from the Report of the Highland Council's Annual Survey of Performance and Attitudes 2013

Respondent's Views as to the 5 most important qualities for the Highland Council to Display

Qualities as Ranked in Order of Importance by Respondents in 2013 Survey	Respondents Mentioning Quality in Their Top 5 (2013) %	Respondents Mentioning Quality in Their Top 5 (2012) %	Respondents Mentioning Quality in Their Top 5 (2011) %
1. Maintains good quality local services	71	73	77
2. Listens to local people	**59**	**57**	**60**
3. Provides value for money	56	58	62
4. Is aware of people's needs	**39**	**36**	**39**
5. Is efficient	36	37	45
6. Involves people in how it spends its money	**35**	**36**	**38**
7. Treats all residents fairly	**32**	**36**	**36**
8. Is environmentally friendly	29	29	32
9. Tells local people what it is doing	**28**	**30**	**34**
10. Is helpful	21	20	18
11. Represents your views	**19**	**20**	**20**
12. Is approachable	17	17	14
13. Is a fair employer	13	12	14

N=1,063 in 2012

Encouraging Participation Work Plan

Timeline	Event	Aims and Objectives of the activity	Action	Done (√)	By Whom
January – March 2013	Lesson Plan for schools	Identify the opportunity for increasing voter turnout for young people through the implementation of a Curriculum For Excellence in schools	• *Further discussion to be carried out with the Education Working Group.* • *Report circulated on 21 March 2013 at CPE Meeting, explaining what was contained in the Curriculum for Excellence and what the current position in Schools was for dealing with democracy.* • *Target school leavers and those on activity agreements.*	✔	Educ Working Group Head of Education Services Educ Working Group
1 February 2013	Promote Voter Registration	Discussions to take place on the options for increasing voter turnout with young people	• *Create a Mobile app.* • *Set up information stands at local events in 2014 ie Black Isle Show.* • *Insert advertisements in RCFC and ICTFC Football programmes and ask for announcements to be made at half-time intervals.* • *Include registration forms in student induction packs and display posters in and around colleges.* • *Include election contact details in college newsletters.*	✔	ERO / Head of Policy/ Election Office

20 February 2013	Democracy in Schools Working Group	Consider the existing election process for young people and investigate an improved method of delivering them. Investigate the available educational democracy resources for incorporating into a range of curriculum subjects in the academic year leading up to elections.	*• Invite pupils to view chambers and take part in discussions/debates.* *• Debating groups developed to compliment democracy themes.* *• Run a pilot democracy based curriculum in one school around the suggested mock election in 2013/14.* *• Elections team continue to contribute to one HYV Exec and conference for the foreseeable future.*	✔	Education/ Election Office
9 March 2013	Highland Youth Voice Executive Committee (Millburn Hostel, Inverness)	Plan to engage young people by discussing a number of initiatives to encourage voting and participation in the democratic process.	*Discussed democracy issues with HYV and it was agreed that the following incentives would be worthwhile: -* *• Better link in with schools on the curriculum for excellence ie teachers to cover specified election topics in subjects like English and Maths;* *• Mock Elections to be run in schools with polling stations set up;* *• Election promotional materials to be handed out in school's;* *• A video of the democratic process to be shown in school's;* *• Awareness adverts to be used on Facebook to encourage people to complete online forms for registering to vote or to click a box for an application form that could be posted out from the Electoral Registration Office;*	✔	YDO's / Election Office

			• *Local newspapers to produce articles on the democratic process and forewarn people about forthcoming elections;* • *Local Councillors to have better contact with schools pupils and to be able to educate them on the democracy process.* *The group indicated that Political Parties needed to be more proactive and educate voters in helping them chose who they should vote for.*		
22 March 2013	Student Council (UHI Building, Inverness)	Plan to engage students and seek their views on the democratic process.	*Discussed the following key elements with the group of students: -* *(i) Are you registered to vote?* *(ii) Why do they / don't they vote?* *(iii) What would encourage you to vote* *Agreed the following incentives : -* • *Recruit student council representatives to fulfil the role as democracy ambassadors. This role would entail engaging with peer groups on the importance of voting and how to vote;* • *Encourage more people to stand in local government elections;* • *Revise the Council's Election homepage.*	✔	UHI/ Election Office UHI Election Office

2 May 2013	Student Focus Group (Thurso College)	Report on why they do / do not vote	*Discussed the following key elements with a group of students: -* o *Why Vote* o *Who can Vote* o *How to Vote* *Agreed the following incentives : -* • *Internet or text voting would encourage more people to vote;* • *Broadcasts on the Council's Web-site with Candidates;* • *Personal statements to be included so that electors know who they are voting for;* • *More information required on what each party represents.*	✔	UHI/ Election Office
9 May 2013	Democracy in Schools Working Group	Plan to look at how to make the election processes more manageable in the schools and how the Council's election team can help facilitate elections round all the schools in 2014.	• *Prepare a democracy pack for schools and other youth organisations.* • *Recruit HYV representatives to fulfil the role as democracy ambassadors. This role would entail engaging with peer groups on the importance of voting and how to vote.* • *Run a mock European Parliamentary Election in one secondary school in November 2014.*	✔	

Date	Event	Description	Actions	✓	Responsible
21 June 2013	Highland Youth Voice Conference (Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Skye)	Session with young people on electoral participation.	• *Workshops to be held with the pupils and discuss the key elements on democracy.* • *Film booth to film pupils on their views on the key elements.* • *Run a mock election.* • *Meet with the MSYP's to discuss election participation.*	✔	YDO's / Election Office
26 June 2013	Democracy in Schools Working Group	*Addressing how the election processes can be more manageable in schools*	• *Further discussion with the Curriculum for Excellence Officer on carrying out an audit on what is currently being done in each school* • *Education Scotland to circulate a briefing paper on political literacy in schools (end of August)* • *Working with external agents dealing with persistent non-attenders in schools*	✔	Election Office/ Educ
4 – 5 October 2013	Highland Youth Voice Executive Committee	*Look at compiling a DVD that can be delivered in Schools and at other youth events to engage young people in participating in the democratic process*	• *Explore with HYV Exec the content of the DVD and democracy pack* • *Prepare scripts for HYV to use for filing and circulate the democracy pack for views*		Election Office/ YDO's

1 October 2013	Highland Council Equality Impact Online Assessment	Equalities screening and impact assessment carried out to ensure that election arrangements are accessible and inclusive.	• *Full assessment to be carried out for future election plans (eg identifying evidence of concerns, consultation and actions)* • *Commence review of Polling Places in Highland* • *Set up Focus Groups to discuss ways of making voting more accessible*		Election Office/ Equal Opp. Officer
October 2013	Highland Council Headquarters	*Recruit "Democracy Ambassadors" to engage pupils and students on the democracy process ie. types of election young people can get involved in; registering to vote and how to vote in an election.*	• *Update Youth Development Officers on the plans for appointing HYV representatives in schools.* • *Recruit ambassadors in schools and colleges*		Election Office/ YDO's/ UHI
November 2013	Pilot a mock election of the European Parliamentary Election with Nairn Academy	Plan to run a mock election of the European Parliamentary Election with S1 to S6 pupils	• *Provide assistance in conducting a mock election of the 2009 European Parliamentary Election* • *Prepare a timetable and election materials ie print ballot papers*		Head Teacher/ YDO / Election Office
13 – 15 November 2013	HYV Conference (Badaguish)	Filming to commence on the DVD for engaging young people in participating in the democratic process	• *HYV representatives to be issued with scripts and fully briefed on their role for filming*		Election Office/ YDO's
November 2013	Highland Council Headquarters	*Training provided to "Democracy Ambassadors" to engage pupils and students on the democracy process of how to register to vote and how to vote in an election.*	• *Provide training to ambassadors in schools and colleges*		Election Office/ YDO's/ UHI

January 2014	Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee	Work with representative disability groups to find out what could make the voting process easier for their members. (The timing of the meetings would be within 6 months of an election taking place so that information is current and any new arrangements are promoted effectively)	• *Discuss what can be done to target groups of people with disabilities.* • *Prepare literature or other aids to assist people with disabilities to highlight that disabled people may take a companion with them to the polling station, or that polling stations have tactile voting templates and large print ballot papers are available to assist with voting including transcripts of BSL on the Highland Council website.*		Election Office/ Head of Policy/ERO/ Equal Opp. Officer
22 May 2013	Pilot a mock election of the European Parliamentary Election with Grantown Grammar School	Plan to run a mock election of the European Parliamentary Election with S1 to S3 pupils	• *Provide assistance in conducting mock election* • *Prepare a timetable and election materials ie print ballot papers*		Head Teacher/ YDO / Election Office
June 2014	HYV Conference	Review to be carried out of the role of democracy ambassador in schools	• *Feedback to be received from HYV representatives on how they have engaged with young people on the democratic process* • *Evaluate the democracy pack and dvd*		Election Office/ YDO's
November 2014	Highland Youth Voice Election (29 Secondary Schools)	Plan to manage and run the Highland Youth Voice Elections similar to statutory elections ie. the setting up polling stations to enable pupils to vote.	• *Prepare a timetable and guidance in running the HYV Election*		YDO's / WM's/ Election Office

May 2015	Pilot a mock election in Secondary Schools	Plan to run a mock election of the Scottish Parliamentary Elections	• *Run mock elections in parallel with the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in secondary schools*		Head Teachers/ YDO's / Election Office