

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

31st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6)

Tuesday 6 December 2022

Understanding Barriers to Participation in Local Politics

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information to inform evidence taking as part of the Committee's work on understanding barriers to participation in local politics.

2. Before the 2022 local elections, the Scottish Government invited candidates to complete a survey as part of "a voluntary demographic survey of candidates running in the Scottish Local Government elections of 2022." The results of this survey were published in November and the final report can be accessed via the following link—

[Local Government Candidates Survey 2022 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

3. The Committee will take evidence on the report at this meeting from the following Scottish Government officials—

- Arfan Iqbal, Principal Researcher, Constitution, International and Migration Analysis; and
- Maria McCann, Head of Elections Team

4. The response rate to the survey was 28.2% and the report notes that "this compares favourably to other Local Government candidate surveys, nonetheless we should recognise that as not all candidates responded to the survey."

5. In terms of conclusions, the report highlights that—

"Overall, there is evidence to point towards the potential for over and under-representativeness of certain segments of the population amongst the candidate respondent group."

6. The report further states that—

"Specifically, there appeared to be notable divergence between the profile of respondents as compared to the overall population with regards to sex, age, education, disability status and socio-economic background. Specifically, we saw evidence for fewer females, younger individuals, individuals with less than degree level qualifications, individuals with a

limiting health condition and individuals from lower-socio economic groups as compared to the population as a whole.”

7. However, the report further notes that “there were also some results that ran contrary to this trend with there being a higher proportion of respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or in some other way other than heterosexual as compared to the overall population.”

Background

8. The Committee previously took evidence on this topic in November 2021 with a view to exploring the reasons for the continuing relative lack of diversity in Scotland’s councillors when compared to the population as a whole. The official report of that meeting is available via the following link: [Meeting of the Parliament: LGHP/23/11/2021 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

9. The Committee then agreed to postpone further work until after the local elections had taken place.

10. On 1 November 2022, the Committee heard jointly from Engender, Elect Her and Women 50:50 on reports, research and resources they had published jointly considering themes relating to women’s representation in local government.

11. The Committee then took evidence from COSLA at the same meeting on a survey it had issued to councillors on remuneration as part of its wider work on addressing barriers to participation in elected politics and increasing councillor diversity.

12. The meeting papers and official report for the meeting on 1 November can be accessed via the following link—

[Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 26th Meeting, 2022 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

13. The Scottish Government also [wrote to the Committee](#) in early October announcing that it had decided to reconstitute the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC), which was previously stood down in 2013. The letter stated that—

“SLARC was established under the provisions of the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 to advise Scottish Ministers on the payment by Local Authorities of remuneration (including pensions), allowances and the reimbursement of expenses incurred by local authority Councillors in accordance with criteria specified by Scottish Ministers as required. As SLARC is the body recognised to recommend any changes to remuneration, it would not be appropriate to deal with the matters SLARC is established in law to provide advice on without reconstituting the body.”

14. The Government published an advert for new SLARC members on 23 September and expects that it will be reconvened from the start of 2023. SLARC is expected to report its recommendations by 31 August 2023.

Future Work

15. Following this evidence session, the Committee will be invited to agree next steps as part of its ongoing work on this topic at a future meeting.

Conclusion

16. The Committee is invited to consider the above information in its evidence with Scottish Government officials.

**Committee Clerks,
December 2022**