



TEITH WARD BY- ELECTION 18 APRIL 2002

ALL POSTAL BALLOT

PILOT EVALUATION REPORT

31st MAY 2002

CONTENTS

| SECTION | Pg. No. |
|--|----------------|
| Contents | 1 |
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| 2. Background | 5 |
| 3. Pilot Objectives | 6 |
| 4. Pilot Process | 7 |
| 5. Evaluation | 9 |
| Methodology | 10 |
| 6. Analysis and Results | 12 |
| Impact on voting | 12 |
| Simplifying the voting process | 13 |
| Security | 22 |
| Administration | 23 |
| 7. Conclusions | 27 |
| 8. Recommendations | 29 |
| Appendix A (i): Pilot application bid | 30 |
| Appendix A (ii): Order for conducting Teith by-election by postal ballot | 39 |
| Appendix B: Questionnaire | 40 |
| Appendix C: Costs | 49 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Teith By-Election on 18th April was conducted by means of an all-postal ballot and was the first electoral pilot to be approved by the Scottish Executive under section 5 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002. This gives Councils the opportunity to try out new electoral systems which aim to make voting more accessible and increase voter turnout.

All eligible voters received a ballot paper and a ballot envelope which could be returned in the reply paid envelope provided or put into ballot boxes situated at Stirling Council headquarters, Viewforth, Stirling or Doune library.

Turnout at the by-election was 63.9% representing a drop of only 4.1% between the 1999 and 2002 elections. The 1999 Council elections took place on the same day as inaugural elections to the Scottish Parliament and turnout was 15% higher than the 1995 Council elections. The turnout at the Teith election is considerably better than the previous by-election in Highland Ward in April 2000, which showed a downturn of 25%. Turnout in the Fife and East Ayrshire by-elections held on the same day and which were conducted by conventional means decreased by 17% and 16% respectively.

In accordance with Scottish Executive requirements, research was undertaken with the key stakeholders, namely the electorate, the candidates and election administrators.

Research with the electorate consisted of a postal survey (20% random sample) and telephone survey (3% sample targeted at multi-electorate households) of the eligible electorate and a focus group. Research with the candidates and election administrators consisted of pre and post election meetings.

The postal and telephone surveys took place between 18th April and 10th May. The resulting evaluation report will be submitted to the Scottish Executive and made publicly available after the Stirling Council meeting on 27th June.

In conclusion, evaluation of the process and survey results has shown the pilot to be successful in meeting both Stirling Council's objectives and the Scottish Executive's key aims which are to simplify the voting process and encourage turnout.

- **Impact on voting:**
 - Evidence suggests all-postal voting had a positive impact on turnout compared to other by-elections.
 - There is no evidence to suggest that postal voting advantaged or disadvantaged any particular political party.
- **Simplifying the voting process:**
 - Results indicate that the pilot was successful in simplifying the process for both the voter and election administrators. The vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the post as a method of voting and expressed a preference for voting by post.
 - Over two thirds said they would prefer to vote at home and use the post in future elections with the convenience of this method being the key factor.

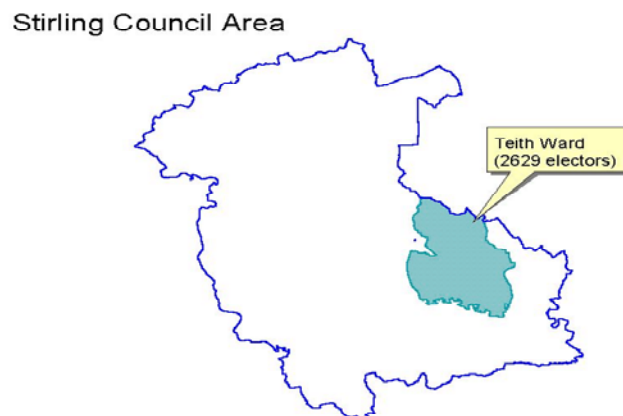
-
- All respondents found the ballot paper and instructions clear and easy to understand suggesting that the new arrangements did not confuse people or disadvantage members of the electorate. The success of the pre-election publicity also contributed to this.
 - Fears regarding the reliability of the postal service were unfounded, there was no evidence to suggest that any resident in Teith eligible to vote did not receive a ballot paper.
 - Evaluation revealed the act of visiting a polling station is considered a significant part of the voting process for some. However 98% of those that voted, returned their vote by post.
 - Administration of the election process was much easier and less bureaucratic than the conventional method and all parties involved indicated a willingness to conduct future polls by postal ballot.
 - Some parts of the process were labour intensive and require automation. However, there would need to be a change in electoral legislation before investment could be justified.
 - There was consensus by stakeholders that any combined election, e.g. Local Government and Scottish Parliament elections, would need to be conducted in a conventional manner for logistical and legislative reasons.
 - **Encouraging non-voters:**
 - There is no evidence to suggest that habitual non-voters were encouraged to or discouraged from voting in the Teith by-election. It was difficult to identify this cohort of the population and engage them in research.
 - **Security:**
 - The evaluation revealed no evidence to suppose there has been any electoral malpractice or fraud either as a result of the omission of the declaration of identity or any other of the postal voting arrangements.
 - The majority of survey respondents thought postal voting was secure.
 - The omission of the declaration of identity and the lack of a marked register were an issue for the political parties.
 - **Costs:**
 - Costs were slightly higher than if the election had been conducted conventionally. However, some of these costs, namely extra labour costs and advertising costs, would be reduced if postal voting became mainstream and the necessary investment in automation was made.
 - **Legislation:**
 - The main problems encountered by administrators throughout the process were the constraints caused by the complex legislative framework that guide how elections should be run. The problems with the count at the Teith by-election were largely a result of the new Order containing old legislation guiding procedures for verifying the declaration of identity.

As a result of the evaluation the following recommendations are made.

- the Scottish Executive support the use of postal ballots for conducting future Local Government by-elections
- if this is supported, the Scottish Executive in association with the Electoral Commission, build on the findings of the evaluation report and those of the English and Welsh pilots and develop best practice guidance for conducting postal ballots
- the Scottish Executive note the views of Stirling Council that to conduct two or more elections in parallel by different means would be logistically and cost prohibitive. However, should legislation be changed to allow all elections to be conducted by post, and the necessary investment in automation made, conducting large-scale and combined elections solely by postal ballot would be feasible.
- the Scottish Executive review the current legislation binding election arrangements with a view to drafting new legislation to simplify the election process to meet current and future needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report details the pilot all-postal ballot in Teith Ward and provides an evaluation of the process in accordance with Scottish Executive requirements. It is presented in 8 sections and provides a brief background to the pilot, details the objectives and election process before providing a thorough evaluation of the process and procedures and drawing conclusions and making recommendations.
- 1.2 There are 22 Wards in the Stirling Council area. Teith Ward (see map below) is the fifth largest with a land area of 204.5 sq. km and a population density of 16 persons per sq. km. It is primarily rural and covers the main settlements of Doune, Deanston, Thornhill, Blairdrummond and Drumvaich. The current population of Teith Ward is 3213 (Stirling at a Glance 2001, Stirling Council) with an eligible electorate of 2629.



2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Section 5 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002 gives Councils the opportunity to try out new electoral systems which aim to make voting more accessible and increase voter turnout. In January 2002 the Scottish Executive invited Local Authorities to apply to run pilot schemes under the terms of the new Act. Guidance on how to apply was promised in late February/early March.
- 2.2 In England, 38 pilot schemes trying out a range of new electoral arrangements took place in the May 2000 elections under the terms of sections 10 and 11 of the Representation of the People Act 2000. Evaluation had shown the greatest increases in voting turnout were those piloting postal voting (Elections - the 21st Century model: an evaluation of May 2000 electoral pilots, LGA Research report 14).
- 2.3 It became evident that the Scottish Executive and the Electoral Commission were keen to see an all-postal ballot pilot in a rural area. Teith Ward, which had become vacant on 3rd November 2001, seemed to meet the Electoral Commissions criteria. Stirling Council agreed to apply to run a pilot scheme conducting the Teith by-election as an all-postal ballot at a Special Meeting of the Council held on 14th

February 2002. The decision was not unanimous with the vote being carried 10 for (the Labour Administration) and 8 against (The Conservative Opposition).

- 2.4 It was recognised that timescales were tight. Application to run the pilot was made on 15th February and ministerial approval and the necessary legislative Order would be required by 28th February 2002 if the pilot were to proceed. A copy of the application is provided at Appendix A (i). Stirling's bid was the first in Scotland and the pilot was devised in the absence of any official guidance from the Scottish Executive. However, reference was made to the guidance for English pilots on the Electoral Commission website (www.electoralcommission.gov.uk).
- 2.5 Stirling Council received notification of approval for the pilot on 27th February. The Stirling Council (All Posting Voting Scheme) Order 2002 came into effect on February 28th, a copy of which is provided at Appendix A(ii). The election took place on Thursday 18th April.

3. PILOT OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The primary objectives set by Stirling Council for the Teith pilot are consistent with the evaluation criteria set by the Scottish Executive, namely
- increased accessibility to the democratic process:
 - by making voting easier for elderly electors, disabled electors, parents with small children, people who work long hours, people who commute long distances and carers who may find it difficult to get to a conventional polling station.
 - by negating the need for electors to travel to a polling station. In rural areas electors often have to travel considerable distances.
 - ensuring equality of access to the democratic process:
 - all electors receive a personally addressed ballot paper in their home ensuring an equal level of access for all. In a conventional poll, polling stations have differing levels of access for disabled electors and are more conveniently situated for some voters than others.
 - simplifying the voting process:
 - dispensing with the declaration of identity will simplify the process and make the process more user friendly. There is evidence that the requirement to sign the declaration and have a third party witness complicates the process particularly for those who live on their own.
 - Making voting more attractive to electors who currently do not vote:
 - voting from home may encourage those who currently choose not to vote to do so.

- Increasing turnout:
 - Evidence from the English pilots has shown postal voting to have a positive impact on turnout. Although turnout in Stirling Council area is normally high, the turnout for the most recent by-elections held in Dunblane (1998) and Highland (2000) Wards showed a significant downturn on previous elections.
- Reducing the administrative costs of elections:
 - by reducing the need for polling stations, polling booths and multiple presiding officers and enumerators.

4. PILOT PROCESS

Pilot Process Timescale

4.1 The following timetable was adopted.

Table 1: Pilot process timetable

| TASK | TIMESCALE |
|--|-------------------|
| Scottish Exec. Letter inviting pilot applications | 23 January |
| Decision to apply for pilot at Special Council Meeting | 14 February |
| Pilot application submitted to Scottish Executive | 15 February |
| Confirmation of successful application | 27 February |
| Order received | 28 February |
| Discussions with Consignia | 6 March |
| Awareness raising (detail provided in section 4.2) | 7 March /20 April |
| Notice of election | 8 March |
| Issue of ballot Papers | 5 April |
| Latest return date for votes | 5p.m. 18 April |
| Count | 7p.m. 18 April |
| Research & Evaluation | March/May |
| Report to Council | 27 June |
| Report to Scottish Executive | 28 June |

Raising Awareness Of The New Electoral Arrangements

4.2 Recognising the criticality of ensuring that both the electorate and the prospective candidates were aware of the new arrangements for the election, provision was made to raise awareness as outlined below.

- Electorate:
 - Pre-election letter to all eligible voters explaining the Pilot and providing details on how to vote (7th March)
 - Using the poll card format to reinforce electoral arrangements
 - Advertising within the Local Council Offices, Post Offices, Library and other public buildings within the Ward in advance of the election
 - Advertising in local newspapers, community newspapers

-
- 2 television interviews, one of which was shown twice. These appeared on Good Morning Scotland on 19th March and Scotland Today and Platform in the week prior to the election.
 - 4 radio interviews. These were Central FM in February on confirmation of the success of the pilot bid, Newsdrive BBC Scotland in the week prior to the election, Politics Today on the day of the election and Radio Scotland on the following Saturday. This was a debate on how to increase the public's interest in politics.
 - Prospective Candidates:
 - Amendments to the Notice of Election, Statement of Persons Nominated and notice of Poll to reflect the all postal ballot
 - All information on new arrangements included in the prospective candidates' nomination pack
 - Briefing of prospective candidates and political parties (8th March).

Pre-Election Notification

4.3 A letter was sent to all residents of Teith Ward who appear on the Stirling Council area electoral register in early March alerting them to the intention to conduct the Teith Ward by-election by means of an all-postal ballot. The letter provided information on

- the issuing of the ballot papers
- absent and proxy voting
- how to vote and return the ballot papers
- the counting of the ballot papers.
- telephone contact for help and information

Issuing Of Ballot Papers

4.4 The electoral roll in the Stirling Local Authority area is the responsibility of the Electoral Registration Office which is a faction of the Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board based at Laurelhill Business Park. As with a conventional poll, electors could request their ballot paper be sent to an address other than that appearing on the electoral register or to appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf. Requests had to be submitted to the Electoral Registration Officer at the Assessors by Wednesday 3rd April, 11 working days before polling day.

4.5 On 5th April, personally addressed envelopes containing instructions for voting, a ballot paper, a white ballot paper envelope (envelope A) and a brown reply paid envelope (envelope B) for returning the ballot paper were sent to all eligible voters. This gave 8 working days for electors to complete and return their ballot papers. Candidates and their agents could be present to witness this stage of the process.

Return Of Ballot Papers

4.6 Closing date for return of ballot papers was 5pm on Thursday 18th April. Electors could return the ballot paper in the reply paid envelope provided or by personally

delivering the ballot in the white envelope to Old Viewforth, Stirling or to Doune library, Main Street Doune.

- 4.7 The declaration of identity, which is required for postal voting in a conventional poll, was exempted in the Order. Past experience shows that ballot papers are often rejected because people have forgotten to sign the declaration, get it witnessed or send it back. In addition the need for a third party to witness the declaration further complicates the process and disadvantages people who live on their own.

Spoilt/Lost Ballot Papers

- 4.8 Provision was made to replace ballot papers which became inadvertently spoilt or lost in the post. In both circumstances the Returning Officer would issue a replacement ballot paper as long as the request was made before 5pm on the day preceding the poll. In the case of a spoilt ballot, electors had to return the original paper along with the two envelopes. In the case of a ballot paper not being received, the elector had to provide evidence of identity.

Counting The Ballot Papers

- 4.9 The counting of all ballot papers returned to the Returning Officer by 5pm on 18th April took place at Thornhill Community Centre starting at 7pm. The count was undertaken in three stages which consisted of opening the brown envelope, opening the white ballot paper envelope and counting the ballot papers. The 12 enumerators were briefed prior to the beginning of the count and between each stage. At stage 1 the brown envelopes were counted and then opened by an envelope-opening machine. At stage 2, the white ballot papers were opened by hand and the number on each ballot paper checked against the number on the envelope. The opened ballot papers were then returned to a ballot box before being redistributed by the Returning Officer for counting the votes. Guidance was given for doubtful and rejected ballot papers.
- 4.10 As with conventional election counts candidates nominated people to be admitted to view the proceedings.

5. EVALUATION

- 5.1 In accordance with Scottish Executive requirements, the Council is required to undertake an evaluation of the pilot for submission to the Scottish Executive and for publication in the local area. The Electoral Pilot Schemes guidance (Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002: Electoral Pilot Schemes, February 2002) states that this report should include details of the pilot and a copy of the Order as well as an assessment of:

- the extent to which the pilot encouraged and facilitated voting and to what extent it enabled voters to make informed decisions at the elections
- the impact of the pilot on turnout figures
- whether there was an increase/decrease in costs as a result of the pilot
- the extent to which the pilot met Minister's aims

-
- whether voters found the new voting procedures easy to use
 - security and whether the new procedures led to any incidence of or increase in electoral fraud or malpractice
 - whether the new arrangements increased/decreased the number of people currently less likely to vote.

METHODOLGY

5.2 To aid the evaluation of the pilot, research was undertaken to gauge the views of the primary stakeholders in the process – the electorate, the candidates/political parties and electoral administrators. This was done using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The Electorate

5.3 Three mechanisms were used to gauge the views of the electorate.

1. Postal Survey: 20% sample of the eligible electorate (539/2629).

- 539 questionnaires were distributed via second class mail on the 18th April. The return date for the questionnaires was the 3rd of May.
- Electors were randomly sampled from the electoral register using a random number generator and questionnaires were personally addressed.
- The questionnaire was designed in-house by the Council's Research Team and consisted of 14 questions. The majority of the questions are in tick box format for ease of completion however there is opportunity for further detailed comment throughout. A neutral shaded paper was used to ensure that no political bias could be interpreted.
- The questionnaire, a copy of which is provided at Appendix B, explored the following areas
 - whether people voted
 - satisfaction with postal voting
 - clarity of ballot paper/instructions
 - voting methods: past, current and future
 - awareness of election prior to Election Day.
- To aid analysis respondents were asked to indicate the following key demographics: age, gender, employment status and tenure. Electors were assured that although the survey was not anonymous it was confidential and that no-one would be identified.
- 178 questionnaires were returned giving a return rate of 33%, which is an excellent return for this type of survey.

2. Telephone Survey: 3% sample of the eligible electorate, primarily targeted at multiple electorate households (70/2629).

-
- Stirling Council switchboard staff carried out 70 telephone interviews during the week beginning 29th April using the same questionnaire as distributed via the post.
 - Individuals were identified from the electoral roll excluding those already sampled to receive a postal questionnaire. The purpose was to determine whether there was a different level of concern regarding the security of the postal voting process amongst those people living within multi-electorate households.
 - Calls were made to named individuals between 5pm and 7pm on weekday evenings. Interviewers were given briefing notes, a suggested script/prompt sheet and a call-logging sheet. When a person could not be reached three further calls were made. If the fourth call was unsuccessful, this was logged as a 'no response'. If a person was not available then arrangements were made to call back at a time that was suitable to the respondent.
 - It was anticipated that the telephone interviews would be successful in reaching non-voters whereas the postal surveys were most likely to be returned by those who voted. This proved to be the case as results show that 22% of telephone respondents were non-voters whereas non-voters made up only 2.4% of the postal respondents.

3. Focus Group: 7 residents of Teith Ward.

- Members of the Stirling Sounding Board, a representative group of citizens within the Stirling Council area who have indicated a willingness to take part in surveys and consultations on a wide variety of issues, were invited to attend a focus group arranged for the Monday evening following the election (22nd April).
- The aim of the focus group was to gather qualitative data that explored the issues in more depth than the postal and telephone survey allowed.
- 8 residents indicated willingness to take part. One resident was unable to take part in the group but emailed comments on the issues and these have been included in the analyses.
- For consistency, the discussions centred on the main themes of the questionnaire as outlined in the summary of the postal survey.

Candidates/Political Parties

5.4 Two meetings were held with election candidates. The first was held on 8th March prior to the election. Its purpose was to talk candidates through the new voting arrangements and gave the opportunity for candidates to ask questions and raise any concerns they may have regarding the pilot scheme. A meeting on 2nd May to gauge views once the election process was complete followed this up. Both meetings were fully attended with representatives from the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, the Scottish Labour Party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Socialists.

Election Process Administrators

5.5 Post-election meetings were held with key people involved in the administration of the by-election to gauge their views on the process. These roles were

-
- the election administrator - responsible for planning and conducting the election process
 - the Electoral Registration Officer - responsible for providing the names and addresses of all eligible electors for the Teith Ward
 - the Returning Officer
 - an enumerator - involved in the count on Election Day.

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

- 6.1 Analysis of the postal and telephone surveys was undertaken in-house using the statistical analysis package SPSS.
- 6.2 Results are reported by the pilot evaluation criteria outlined in section 5.1. They are primarily reported by all respondents but where there are significant differences between telephone and postal respondents or voters and non-voters this is highlighted. Analysis by key demographic variables, age, gender etc showed that results were consistent across all groups and reporting by these variables would not add value. Results of the focus group discussions and interviews with candidates and election administrators are incorporated throughout.

IMPACT ON VOTING

- 6.3 A key part of the evaluation is whether the postal ballot had an impact on voting turnout. Evidence from the English pilots in 2000 suggests that postal voting had a positive impact on turnout. Another issue is whether postal voting benefits some political parties more than others and therefore affects the share of the votes.

Turnout

- 6.4 There is evidence to suggest all-postal voting had a positive impact on turnout in the Teith by-election. Turnout was 63.9% representing a drop of 4.1% between the 1999 Council and Scottish Parliamentary elections and 2002 by-election. It is generally accepted that the 1999 turnout was enhanced due to the Local Government Elections being combined with that of the Scottish Parliament and it was anticipated that the turnout may have decreased by much more. Indeed at the by-election in Highland Ward in April 2000, turnout decreased by 25% from 68% to 43%.
- 6.5 Further evidence to support this is the results of the conventional by-elections held in Fife and East Ayrshire on the same day as the Teith by-election. Turnout in Central Fife Ward was 37.2%, a decrease of 17% from the 1999 election. In East Ayrshire, turnout in Dalmellington Ward was 44.8% representing a decrease of 16%.

Affecting voting share

- 6.6 At the post election meeting on 2nd May, a political party raised concerns regarding the potential for the postal voting system to affect the balance of the vote by helping some parties and hindering others. In particular it was suggested that the low literacy levels of certain sectors of society, namely the elderly and low-income families, might mean a significant drop in votes for the parties traditionally supported

by these sections of society. Some other candidates at the meeting supported this view.

6.7 Review of the English and Welsh pilots offered no evidence to suggest postal voting helped or hindered any particular political party. From Table 2 it can be seen that there is no evidence to suggest this to be the case in the Teith by-election either. There is little change in the voting share of the parties. The largest swing is from the Labour Party, which may be related to the involvement of a Scottish Socialist Party candidate at the 2002 election.

Table 2: % share of votes by political party

| CANDIDATE | 1999 | 2002 | CHANGE 1999-2002 |
|---|-------|-------|---------------------|
| Scottish Socialist Party | N/A | 3.2% | N/A |
| Scottish Labour Party | 20.5% | 14.1% | -6.4 % |
| Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party | 39.1% | 38.3% | -0.8% |
| Scottish Liberal Democrat | 14.8% | 15.9% | +1.1% |
| Scottish National Party | 25.5% | 28.3% | +2.8% |

Source: Returning Officer, Stirling Council

SIMPLIFYING THE VOTING PROCESS

6.8 A key objective of the pilot was to determine the extent to which the postal ballot made voting easier for the voter. A number of the questions in the survey were targeted at exploring this issue.

Ease of voting

6.9 Results show the vast majority of respondents to be satisfied with the post as a method of voting.

Figure 1: How satisfied/dissatisfied are you with voting by post?

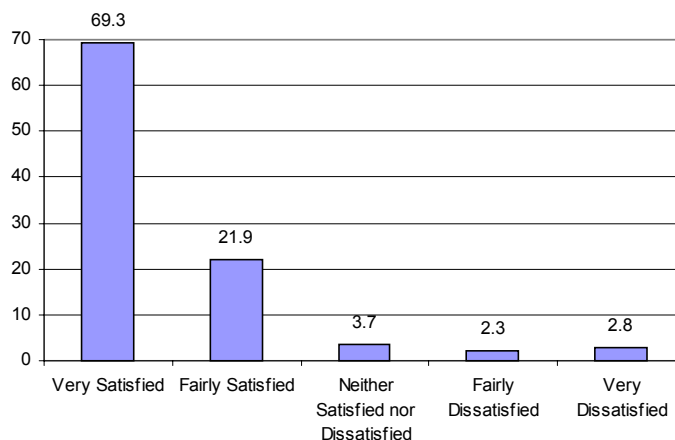
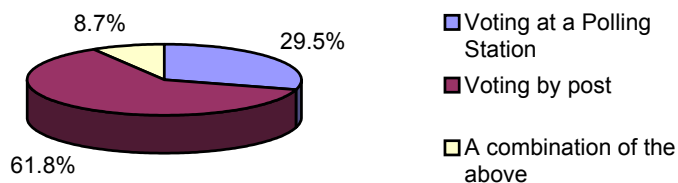


Figure 1 shows that 91.2% of survey respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with voting by post. Discussions at the focus group revealed that all were satisfied with using post as a method of voting.

6.10 A minority of survey respondents indicated dissatisfaction with the postal vote. Less than 3% of respondents were very dissatisfied and 2.3% fairly dissatisfied. The reasons for dissatisfaction related to the security of the postal vote, the postage costs and a feeling of disengagement from the process - that the postal vote somehow lacked significance because you didn't physically go to the polling station to vote. This view was expressed in the focus group. Although the group found the postal vote a positive experience and acknowledged the convenience of postal voting, half of the group indicated they would still prefer to vote at a polling station. There was a general feeling that you should 'go out and vote with your feet', that voting isn't supposed to be convenient. The act of visiting a polling station and putting your paper in a ballot box appears to be a significant part of voting. The implication being that the ritual of voting is as important as the actual casting of the vote. However investigation shows that although people may think this, in reality only 1.6% (43/2629) of votes were posted into the ballot boxes at Doune library and Old Viewforth. The remaining 98.4% posted their ballot. There were also some concerns regarding security which are discussed later in sections 6.33 to 6.36.

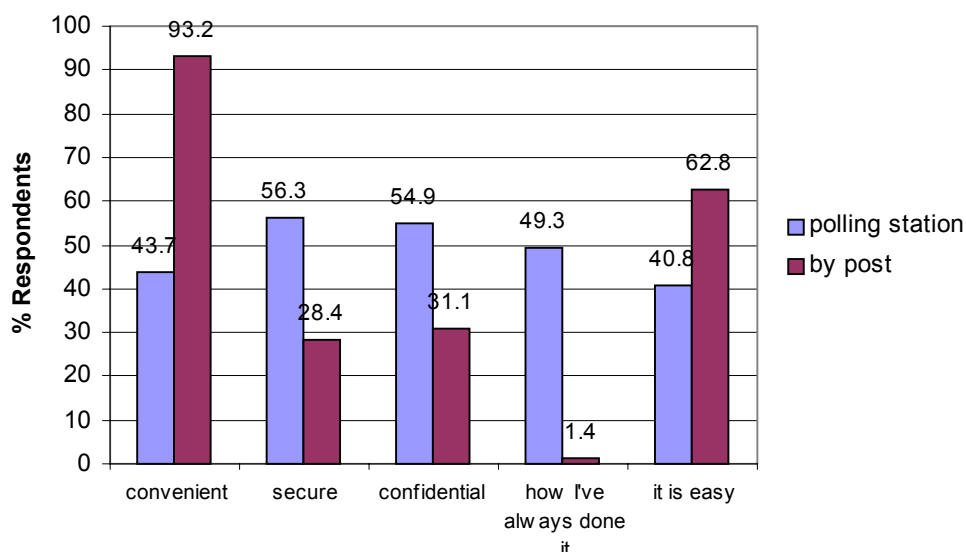
6.11 When asked which conventional method of voting was preferred, the majority of survey respondents indicated a preference for voting by post (see Figure 2). As mentioned above focus group views were split. Although all were happy with post as a method of voting, about half would still prefer to attend a polling station.

Figure 2: Which conventional method of voting do you prefer?



6.12 When respondents were asked why they chose their preferred method of voting, 93% of respondents who preferred voting by post said this was because it was convenient and 63% said it was because it was easy to do. The reasons for preferring voting at a polling station were more evenly spread with only 44% indicating convenience and 41% ease of use. These results can be seen in more detail in Figure 3 (N.B: figures sum to more than 100% as respondents could tick more than one option).

Figure 3: Why do you prefer this method of voting?



6.13 Focus group participants expressed the view that voting by post overcame many of the barriers to voting. It was felt that postal voting gave those that want to vote but can't vote for practical reasons the opportunity to do so easily in the comfort of their own home. It made voting more accessible to older people and those who have mobility problems. It also meant that working parents or people who work long hours or commute could vote more easily. The opportunity to vote was also increased as the time available is widened. It means voting can be done over a period of days rather than on one particular day which may not be convenient. Participants were aware that postal voting is currently available on demand, but they preferred the passivity of the all-postal ballot. The current method requires effort to opt in to the process. One respondent commented on the compulsory voting systems operated in countries such as Australia.

Voting Procedures

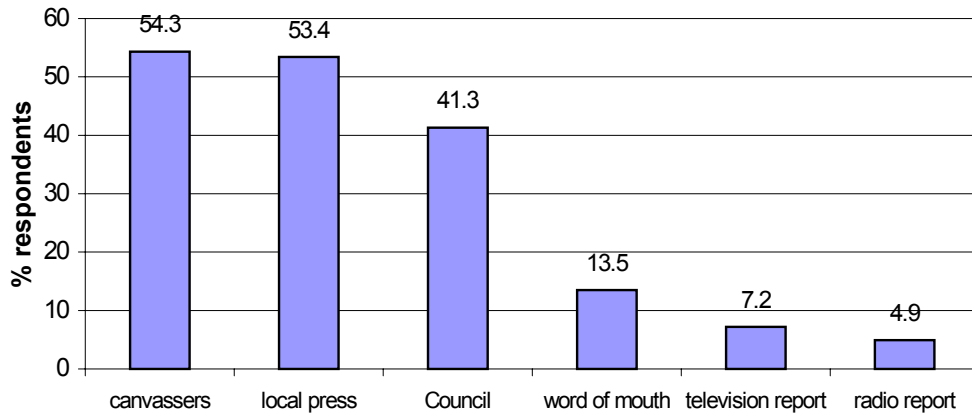
6.14 A key objective in planning the pilot was to ensure that the voting process was easy to use and the new procedures were clearly communicated to everyone involved. The survey asked questions about the clarity of the instructions and the clarity of the ballot paper itself. The Council recognised the importance of ensuring that everyone was aware of the changes to voting procedures before the ballot papers arrived through letterboxes and undertook a variety of awareness raising exercises as previously outlined in section 4.2.

- 89% of respondents said they were aware the by-election was taking place before the ballot paper arrived.
- Of the 12% of respondents who did not vote in the election, a quarter said they were unaware, the majority of which were telephone respondents and therefore in a multi-electorate household.
- Over 50% of this group are in the 18 to 24 year age band.

- All members of the focus group said they were aware of the pilot prior to the ballot paper arriving.

6.15 When asked how they became aware of the election, all members of the focus group quoted the letter from the Council as the primary source. Figure 4 shows that the primary sources for survey respondents were election canvassers and the local press.

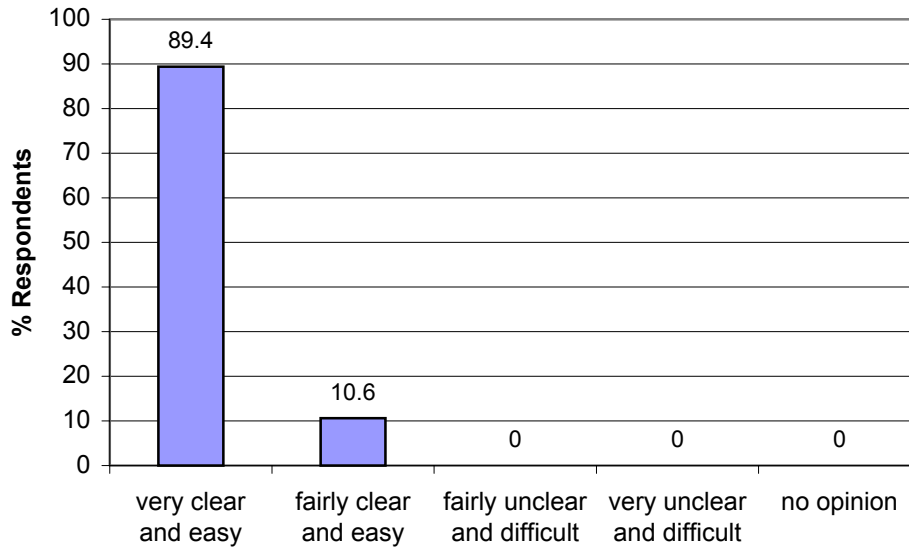
Figure 4: Method of awareness of election



6.16 Although the majority of respondents became aware of the by-election through pre-election publicity, only a quarter said the pre-election publicity encouraged them to vote and 75% indicated that it made no difference. This was also the view of the focus group.

6.17 At the post-election meeting with candidates on 2nd May concern was raised regarding the low literacy ability of some sectors of society, in particular low-income families and elderly people. Candidates suggested that people with low literacy abilities would be confused with the new arrangements thereby disadvantaging members of the electorate and potentially affecting the vote. Survey results do not support this view. As can be seen from Figure 5, all respondents found the instructions for completing the ballot paper clear and easy to understand with nine in ten respondents indicating 'very clear and easy'.

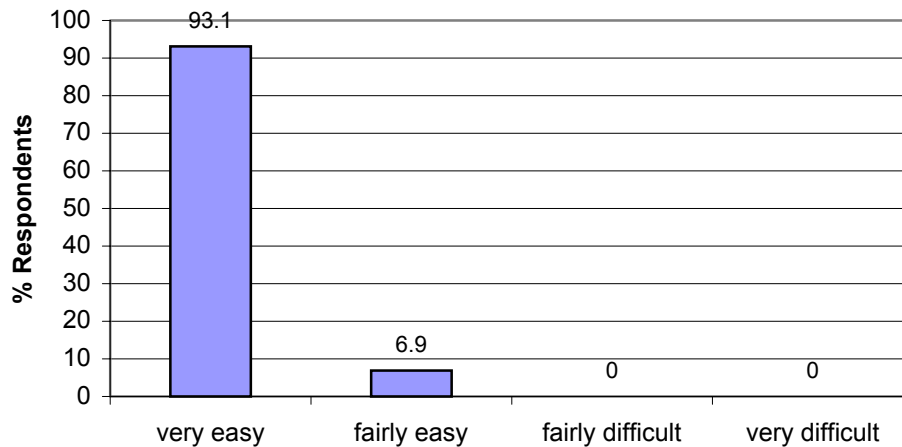
Figure 5: Clarity of instructions on completing the ballot paper



6.18 When asked to suggest improvements to the instructions the majority of respondents said they were acceptable as they were. However two respondents indicated that pre-election communications should have been posted all at once. This sentiment was echoed by the focus group who thought the instructions were clear and easy to understand but felt that the second communication from the Council was unnecessary.

6.19 Figure 6 shows when asked about the ballot paper itself, all respondents indicated that it was easy to complete.

Figure 6: How easy is the ballot paper to complete?

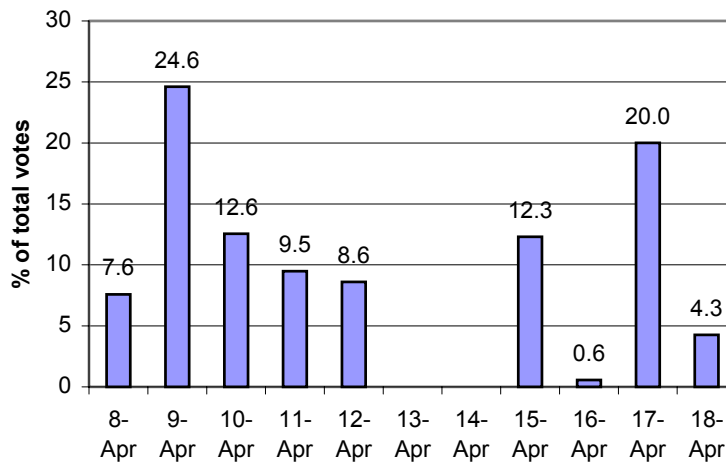


6.20 Again this was mirrored by the focus group. When asked to suggest improvements the majority of survey respondents indicated none were required. One suggestion from the focus group was to include a 'none of the above' option.

6.21 There were only 2 calls to the helpline and both were clarifying deadlines rather than any difficulty or confusion about the process. Two residential homes in the Ward were issued with mobile election machines. Officers offered on-site help but none was requested. Review of the marked register shows that only 3 residents (of 38) from the larger residential home cast their vote.

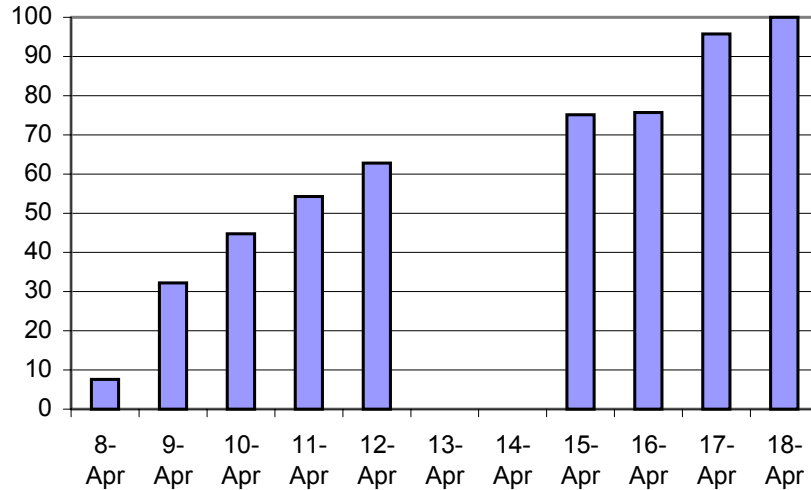
6.22 One concern when devising the pilot was whether voters would find the time available between receiving the ballot paper and the deadline for casting the vote too short. The time available was 8 working days. This proved to be unfounded as no survey respondent indicated the time to be too short and focus group discussions indicated the time to be about right. One participant commented on the importance of not having too long an interval between receiving the ballot and casting the vote to minimise the risk of putting mail to the side and forgetting about it. Figure 7 shows the daily number of votes received via the post as a percentage of total posted votes.

Figure 7: Votes received by post per day (% of total votes)



6.23 Figure 8 shows the running total over the period. It can be seen that 75% of the total vote was received between Monday 8th April and Monday 15th April inclusive. A further 20% was received the day before the election with the remaining 4% on the day of the election.

Figure 8: Daily Total of Votes received by post (% of total votes posted)

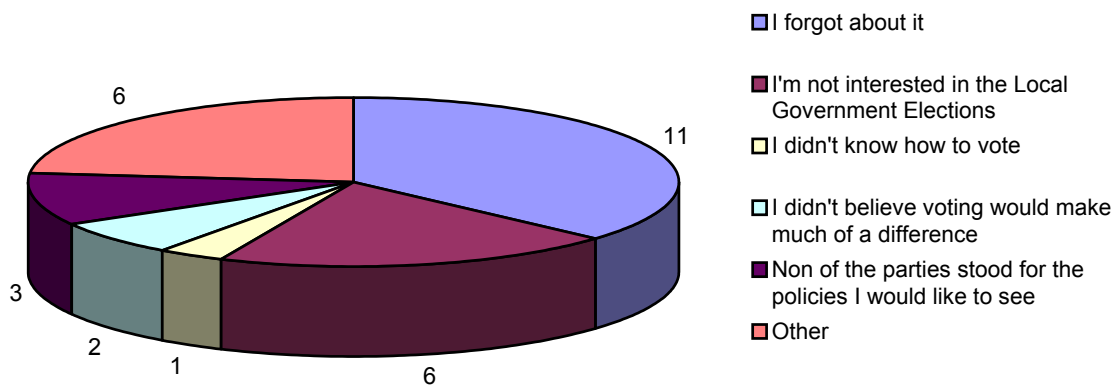


Encourage voters who are currently less likely to vote

6.24 It is difficult to assess whether the postal ballot encouraged habitual non-voters to use their vote. The only way to ascertain this is to ask the non-voters. The postal survey was a randomly drawn sample, a proportion of which was likely to include non-voters. However, non-voters were unlikely to take the time to complete and return the survey. A register of voters was retrospectively compiled using the white ballot paper envelopes, a review of which revealed 40% of the postal questionnaires went to people who had not voted in the by-election. Only 6% of this cohort returned questionnaires. However non-voters made up almost 23% of the telephone surveys. In total 11.8% of survey respondents said they did not vote in the by-election.

6.25 Figure 9 provides the reasons given for not voting in the Teith by-election.

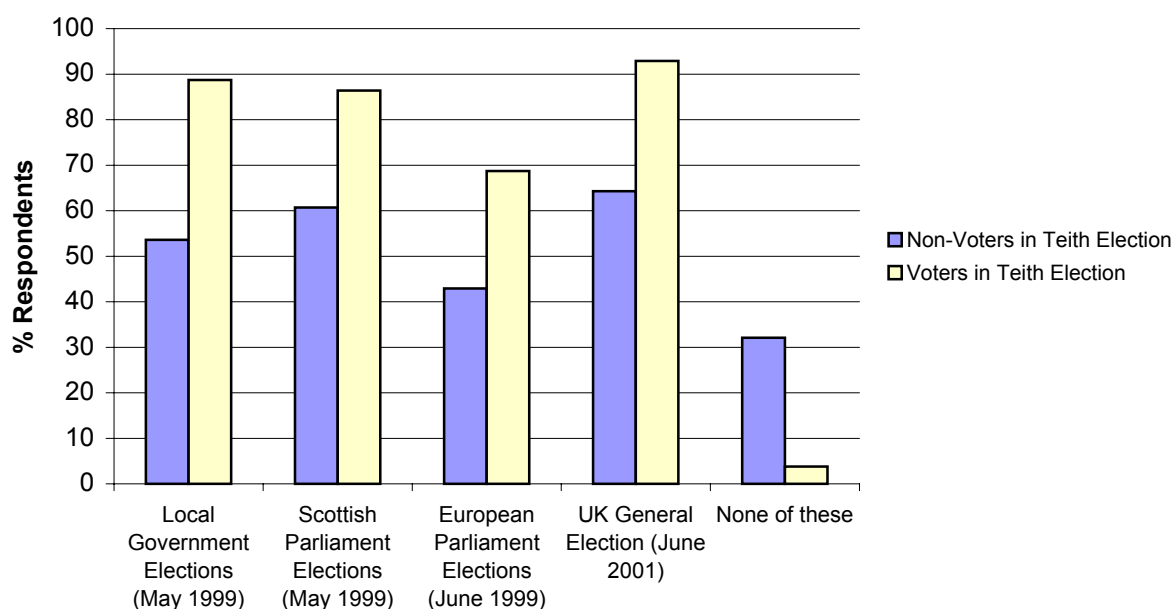
Figure 9: Reasons for not voting in the Teith By-Election (frequency)



6.26 Other reasons were given as being on holiday and therefore not able to complete the ballot. One postal survey respondent said they didn't vote because they disagree with the concept of postal voting and one completed the ballot but forgot to return it. A telephone survey respondent in the 18 to 24 age group didn't vote because they felt that politics only reflect the older person's viewpoint.

6.27 If it could be shown that a large proportion of the electorate voted in the Teith election but had not voted in previous elections, this could be evidence that the postal vote encouraged people to vote that would not have done otherwise. Respondents were asked whether they had voted in any of the main elections since May 1999. Figure 10 gives the response for the 12% that did not vote in the Teith election along with the 88% of those that did.

Figure 10: Voting in previous elections



6.28 There is no evidence from the survey results to conclude that habitual non-voters were encouraged to vote. Results show that those who voted in the Teith by-election were more likely to have voted in the previous elections listed. Similarly only 2 voters in the Teith election indicated that they had never voted previously. Unsurprisingly a larger proportion of those that did not vote in the Teith election indicated that they had not voted in any of the elections listed.

6.29 The reasons given by the non-voters were mainly that they were not interested in voting. The reasons given by Teith election voters for not voting in the listed elections were more varied. Several indicated non-interest and the parties not representing policies that the electorate would like to see. Two respondents said that they did not vote as they did not think it would make a difference. Other comments were being previously too young to vote, forgetting to vote or not receiving a polling card due to a recent move in house.

Future voting methods

6.30 Respondents were asked how they would prefer to vote in future and where. Figures 11 and 12 show the results (N.B: answers sum to more than 100% as respondents could indicate more than one option).

Figure 11: Where would you prefer to vote in future (% of all respondents)

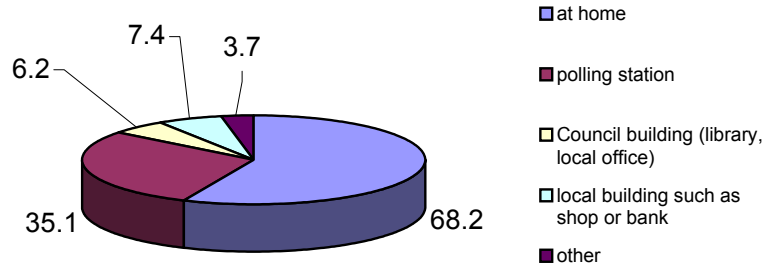
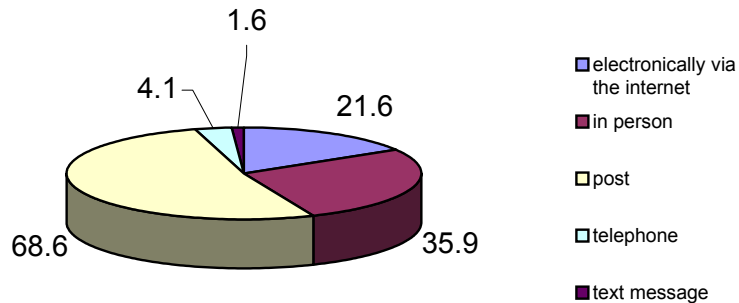


Figure 12: How would you prefer to vote in future? (% of all respondents)



6.31 It can be seen that almost seven in ten respondents would prefer to vote at home and use the post. This is followed by voting in person and at a polling station with three in ten respondents indicating thus. This view was supported by the focus group who felt that the most convenient method is voting from home by post or electronically via the internet. However security and digital exclusion were raised as issues. It was suggested that a range of options should be offered so people could choose the best option to suit.

6.32 Survey respondents that indicated a preference for voting at buildings other than conventional polling stations suggested supermarkets (4) and libraries (3). One respondent commented that polling in Post Offices might help to keep the rural Post Offices open.

SECURITY

6.33 Review of the pilots in England and Wales found no evidence that postal voting led to an increase in electoral fraud (Elections – the 21st Century model. An evaluation of May 2000 local election pilots, LGA Research Report 14). In applying for the pilot, the Council recognised that although the new arrangements may not increase the security of the election there was no reason to suppose it would make it less secure either. However, the security of the postal voting arrangements and whether there was an increased possibility of electoral fraud or malpractice was a key concern of the political parties and election candidates. At the Special Council meeting held to consider the application to run a pilot, the Conservative group highlighted a number of reservations, one of which was the potential increase in the scope for personation. This was further emphasised at the pre and post election meetings with the candidates and the Returning Officer. A number of issues were cited as potential factors which are discussed below along with a commentary of results.

Survey results

6.34 Evaluation results show no evidence to suppose there has been any electoral malpractice or fraud either as a result of the omission of the declaration of identity or any other of the postal voting arrangements. Analysis showed respondents to have fewer concerns about the security of the process than the candidates did. Eight in ten survey respondents (78%) thought using the post as a method of voting was secure.

6.35 Two in ten (22%) said they didn't think it secure. The predominant reason for thinking the process insecure was that anyone could intercept and fill in the ballot paper as there was no way of knowing the appropriate person completed it. Focus group members concurred with this view and felt this would be a potential issue for multi-electorate households. However, analysis revealed that telephone respondents were no more likely to think postal voting insecure than postal respondents therefore there is no evidence to suggest that there were any problems regarding electoral fraud in multi-electorate households. Seven respondents expressed the opinion that the postal system was less secure than the polling station. Only one person commented on the potential for a member of the household to pressurise other members into voting a particular way.

6.36 Although focus group discussions highlighted concerns regarding security of the process it was suggested concerns had to be balanced against the likelihood of fraud happening.

Candidates concerns

6.37 The candidates' concerns related to key parts of the process which it was suggested would increase the scope for personation.

- Declaration of identity:

As discussed previously the decision was to omit the declaration of identity as experience shows that ballot papers are often rejected because people have forgotten to sign the declaration, get it witnessed or indeed to send it back. This was supported by results of the election count. In total only 3 ballot papers were

rejected as whereas at the Local Government elections elections in 1999, there were more than 30 rejected on the basis of the declaration.

At the meeting on 2nd May, candidates were still of the view that some form of declaration was needed which was not onerous on the voter or the election administrators.

- **Marked register:**

SNP and Conservative candidates expressed concern that there would be no marked register both before and after the election. This was viewed as a key security feature especially as the declaration of identity was exempted from the Order. To ensure a thorough evaluation of the pilot the Council decided to compile a marked register retrospectively. This could only be done by matching the white ballot envelopes to the electoral register. The candidates were advised at the meeting on 2nd May that a register had been compiled to support research purposes but would not be available for inspection.

- **Undue influence:**

The potential for someone to complete ballot papers on behalf of the whole household or for a member of the household to put undue pressure onto other members and hence influence their vote was an issue. It was recognised that the postal questionnaire would not be sufficient to explore this issue. However as this was potentially an issue for multi-electorate households and the telephone interviews were targeted at randomly selected named individuals in multi-electorate households, this may identify if there were any problems in this area. As highlighted previously, analysis showed no evidence to support either of these concerns.

ADMINISTRATION

6.38 A key objective of the pilot was to make the administration of the election easier. As outlined in section 5.5, post election meetings were held with the election administrator, the Electoral Registration Officer and the Returning Officer to gauge their views on the process.

General Comments on Process

6.39 The election administrator expressed the view that the postal election process was much easier and less bureaucratic than the conventional method as there was more control over the process. Although initial stages were time consuming due to the need to plan to run the election by conventional methods as well as the postal scheme (in case the pilot application bid was unsuccessful), once approval was given the postal scheme was much easier to run. The Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer supported this view.

6.40 It is recognised that some parts of the process were labour intensive and would need automation if the process were to be adopted on a wider scale and these are discussed below. However, there would need to be a change in the electoral legislation before the Council could justify investing in the necessary machinery.

-
- 6.41 All parties involved in the administration of the ballot would be happy to conduct future polls by postal ballot. However there was consensus that any combined election such as Local Government and Parliamentary elections, would need to be conducted in a conventional manner for logistical and legislative reasons. Under current legislation Parliamentary elections must be conducted conventionally. To conduct two or more elections in parallel by different means would be logistically and cost prohibitive. However, should legislation be changed to allow all elections to be conducted by post, and the right investment in automation made, conducting large-scale and combined elections solely by postal ballot would be feasible. Similarly, if the Local Government elections were separated from the Parliamentary elections, these could easily be conducted by postal ballot.
- 6.42 Candidates and their agents also stated their workloads throughout the process were reduced significantly compared to conventional polling. Observations on key parts of the process are detailed below.

Postal Service

- 6.43 Candidates expressed concerns about the reliability of using the postal service given the potential for ballots getting lost in the post. Similarly these concerns were raised at the focus group - how do you know that the ballot arrived and was counted? In addition a further complication at the time was an ongoing dispute and potential for strike action by Consignia staff.
- 6.44 The Council anticipated these concerns and had early meetings with Consignia before deciding to go ahead with the pilot application. Consignia gave assurances that strike action was highly unlikely. Postal workers were made aware of the postal ballot and Consignia were confident that there would be no problems with the delivery. The Council devised a contingency plan which would involve hand delivery of ballot papers through Council Local Offices if required.
- 6.45 There was concern that votes posted before 18th April would be delayed in the post and therefore not counted. Investigation showed this fear to be unfounded. Twenty-nine ballots were received after the election however none were posted before polling day and therefore delayed in the post. Four were post marked 18th April 7.45pm, and the rest were post marked after the 18th. This perhaps highlights the problem in rural areas where postal uplifts are sometimes limited to one a day.
- 6.46 The pilot bid also made provision for dealing with ballot papers which got lost in the post or were inadvertently spoiled as previously outlined in section 4.8. In reality there were no problems with the delivery or return of the ballot papers. No-one reported not receiving a ballot paper and no-one requested replacement of a spoiled ballot paper.

Timescales

- 6.47 The election administrator had more control over the process due to the ability to influence the Order, which sets out how the election will be run. This gave the opportunity to plan timescales and deadlines and build in some slack to the process. This is not possible in a conventional poll due to the restrictive nature of much of the legislation. The Electoral Registration Officer supported this view.

Electoral Register

6.48 The Electoral Registration Officer commented that the production of the register of eligible voters was made easier by the all postal ballot. This was because everyone was voting by post and there was no need to have a separate register for those voters who have opted for a postal ballot. Since the introduction of postal voting on demand, the number of electors in the Stirling area opting for a postal vote has risen from approximately 400 to 2500 in the last year alone. The introduction of the rolling register which is updated monthly as opposed to annually has meant that the register is as current as possible and therefore less people miss out on eligibility to vote due to recent house moves.

Issuing of ballot papers

6.49 This was relatively easy as there was no counterfoil and the ballot papers were in notebook form. This is not possible with a conventional poll. The omission of the declaration of identity meant there were fewer papers to issue than when issuing postal votes in a conventional manner. However it is recognised that this was very labour intensive and would need some automation if postal voting were to be adopted on a wider scale.

6.50 Although the preference was for all envelopes to be personally addressed the Assessors software does not allow for this. Instead names and address labels were provided which were then put on the envelopes. An envelope-printing machine would make this part of the process easier. It is not felt that the costs of developing the necessary software to allow this would be prohibitive but the envelope printer would be a significant cost for the pilot.

Polling Station Requirements

6.51 By eliminating the need for Polling Stations a considerable amount of pre-election preparation which requires significant input in terms of time and human resource was eliminated. This also restricted the potential for Election Day tensions between candidates, which can be a source of friction adding to the difficulties of presiding over polling stations.

- Two of the polling stations within the Teith Ward are Primary schools. The postal ballot meant there was no need to disrupt curricular activities by closing the schools for a day.
- The postal ballot negated the need to appoint and train Presiding Officers or polling station staff. The rules surrounding Presiding Officers are quite strict and can lead to confusion and sometimes conflict.
- The need to appoint the back up staff required to satisfy health and safety requirements at polling stations was eliminated.

The Count

6.52 The count took 1hr and 55 minutes and was undertaken in three stages. The 12 enumerators were briefed prior to the beginning of the count and between each stage. Enumerators found the briefing process clear and helpful. At stage 1 the brown envelopes were counted and then opened by an envelope-opening machine. At stage 2, the white ballot papers were opened by hand and the number on each

ballot paper checked against the number on the envelope. The opened ballot papers were then put into a ballot box before removal for counting the votes. Guidance was given for doubtful and rejected ballot papers. Only 3 papers were rejected in total.

- 6.53 It was suggested that the count was more complicated and needed more people than a conventional count. However the need for more bodies at the count is counter balanced by having presiding officers and enumerators at polling stations.
- 6.54 It was recognised that the counting process could be improved and the need to eliminate some of the stages and automate others was apparent. The timescale between submitting the bid and getting approval was tight. There was limited time available to check the changes in the Order. The changes concentrated on the issuing of the ballot paper rather than arrangements for the count, which still reflected the requirements for a conventional poll. This resulted in extra procedures that were unnecessary- namely extra counting and verification procedures caused by the two-envelope system.
- 6.55 The intention when submitting the bid was to have one envelope with no number, which would contain the ballot paper. Verification would then be a straightforward count of ballot papers and envelopes. However, the new Order still made reference to arrangements for the postal voting system within a conventional poll, which makes provision of verification of the declaration of identity. Although the reference to the declaration of identity was removed in the Order, the reference to the verification process was not. This meant that the counting process had to include a verification of numbers on ballot papers to envelopes. Having one envelope would facilitate the process in future and eliminate the need for additional verification counts. Taking the Teith count as a guide this could reduce the time taken by 50 minutes.
- 6.56 The complexity arises because there is no one piece of legislation that covers Local Government Elections. The Order for the postal ballot made reference to six different Rules, Acts and Regulations. Council Officers suggest that instead of starting with existing legislation and amending it to fit with new practices and procedures, it would be more beneficial to take a fresh look at the election process and write new legislation to fit the purpose of all-postal ballots.
- 6.57 It is recognised that automation of the opening of the envelopes is an important factor. Opening of the white envelopes by hand was time consuming and made counting the ballot papers more difficult as many were slightly damaged by the letter openers.

Costs

- 6.58 A breakdown of costs is provided at Appendix C. The cost of conducting the by-election by postal ballot was approximately £6360. This represents an increase of approximately £680 on the estimated cost of the poll conducted in a conventional manner. This is consistent with the findings of the English pilots that revealed a slight increase in costs for postal ballots.

6.59 However, review of the process has identified areas where costs could be reduced in future. For instance feedback has suggested that the second pre-election mailing from the council could be eliminated saving approximately £550. Catering costs could be reduced saving a further £30. In addition, the postal ballot includes £420 for staff costs. If the issuing of the ballot papers was automated this would be greatly reduced. The cost of placing the election and poll notices in the press were approximately £250 higher than if the poll had been run in a conventional manner. This resulted from the placing of larger adverts explaining the new arrangements. If postal voting were to be adopted in future, this cost would reduce as the need to explain arrangements would be eliminated as people became familiar with the process.

6.60 Taken together this would suggest that if postal ballots were regularly held, the net cost would be less than conventional elections.

Contact with the Public

6.61 There was less contact with the electorate than is usual in a conventional poll. As mentioned previously the Council received only two calls regarding the postal ballot and these were all clarifying deadlines rather than problems with how to vote. The Electoral Registration Officer received less than half a dozen calls as opposed to forty to fifty calls received during a conventional election. The majority of these calls relate to people applying for postal votes, the pilot meant that people received postal ballots automatically.

6.62 Although the postal ballot relieved pressures on election administrators, some survey respondents said they missed the buzz of the polling station and interaction with presiding officers, other electors and the political candidates.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The evaluation has shown the pilot to be successful in meeting both the Stirling Council objectives and Scottish Executive key aims as previously outlined in sections 3.1 and 5.1 respectively.

7.2 Impact on voting:

- Evidence suggests all-postal voting had a positive impact on turnout.
- There is no evidence to suggest that postal voting advantaged or disadvantaged any particular political party.

7.3 Simplifying the voting process:

- Results indicate that the pilot was successful in simplifying the process for both the voter and the election administrators. The vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the post as a method of voting and expressed a preference for voting by post.
- Over two thirds said they would prefer to vote at home and use the post in future elections with the convenience of this method being the key factor

-
- All respondents found the ballot paper and instructions clear and easy to understand suggesting that the new arrangements did not confuse people or disadvantage members of the electorate. The success of the pre-election publicity also contributed to this.
 - Fears regarding the reliability of the postal service were unfounded, there was no evidence to suggest that any resident in Teith eligible to vote did not receive a ballot paper.
 - Evaluation revealed the act of visiting a polling station is a significant part of the voting process for some. However 98% of those that voted, returned their vote by post.
 - Administration of the election process was much easier and less bureaucratic than the conventional method and all parties involved indicated a willingness to conduct future polls by postal ballot.
 - Some parts of the process were labour intensive and require automation. However, there would need to be a change in electoral legislation before investment could be justified.
 - There was consensus by stakeholders that any combined election would need to be conducted in a conventional manner for logistical and legislative reasons.

7.4 Encouraging non-voters:

- There is no evidence to suggest that habitual non-voters were encouraged to or discouraged from voting in the Teith by-election. It is difficult to identify this cohort of the population and engage them in research.

7.5 Security:

- The evaluation revealed no evidence to suppose there has been any electoral malpractice or fraud either as a result of the omission of the declaration of identity or any other of the postal voting arrangements.
- The majority of survey respondents thought postal voting was secure.
- The omission of the declaration of identity and the lack of a marked register remain an issue for the political parties.

7.6 Costs:

- Costs were slightly higher than if the election had been conducted conventionally. However, some of these costs namely extra labour costs and advertising costs would be reduced if postal voting became mainstream and the necessary investment in automation was made.

7.7 Legislation:

- The main problems encountered by administrators throughout the process were the constraints caused by the complex legislative framework that guide how elections should be run. The problems with the count at the Teith by-election were largely a result of the new Order containing old legislation guiding procedures for verifying the declaration of identity.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that the Scottish Executive

- support the use of postal ballots for conducting future Local Government by-elections
- if this is supported, in association with the Electoral Commission, build on the findings of the evaluation report and those of the English and Welsh pilots and develop best practice guidance for conducting postal ballots
- note the views of Stirling Council that to conduct two or more elections in parallel by different means would be logistically and cost prohibitive. However, should legislation be changed to allow all elections to be conducted by post, and the necessary investment in automation made, conducting large-scale and combined elections solely by postal ballot would be feasible.
- review the current legislation binding election arrangements with a view to drafting new legislation to simplify the election process to meet current and future needs.

Author: Caroline Moore
Research Officer
Research & Quality Team
Policy Unit
Chief Executive Services
Stirling Council

Tel: 01786 442796

Email: moorec@stirling.gov.uk

Date: 31 May 2002



**APPLICATION TO UNDERTAKE
A PILOT ELECTION INITIATIVE:**

**ALL POSTAL BALLOT IN A SINGLE RURAL WARD
WARD 18 (TEITH), STIRLING COUNCIL**

Stirling Council wishes to make application to the Scottish Executive to undertake an all postal pilot ballot in the forthcoming by-election in Ward 18 (Teith) of Stirling Council. The application is made in accordance with the provisions contained in Section 5 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002.

1. AUTHORITY

Stirling Council
Viewforth
Stirling
FK8 2ET

Returning Officer: Keith Yates
Chief Executive
Stirling Council

Contact Officer: Joyce Allen
Committee Officer
Stirling Council
Viewforth
Stirling

Tel No: 01786 443370
E-mail: allenj@stirling.gov.uk

2. TYPE OF ELECTION

The Council is divided into 22 Wards. The current political composition of the Council is as follows:-

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Labour | 11 |
| Conservative | 9 |
| SNP | 1 |
| Vacancy | 1 |

The election to fill the vacancy in the rural Ward 18 (Teith) requires to be held by 22 April 2002. The Ward contains the communities of Doune, Deanston, Thornhill, Blair Drummond and farmland right up to Callander. The Returning Officer wishes to have the election/counting day as Thursday 18 April 2002.

3. COUNCIL RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF APPLICATION

Stirling Council will consider a report on this application on Thursday 14 February 2002. A copy of the resolution supporting this application will be forwarded immediately following the meeting.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHEME

The proposed pilot scheme will take the form of an election conducted wholly by postal voting in Ward 18 (Teith) of Stirling Council. There will be no polling stations in the Ward.

a. A ballot paper (stamped with the official mark), a reply-paid envelope and instructions for voting will be sent to every local government elector on the electoral register for Ward 18.

b. Although all ballot papers will be issued by post, electors will still have the right to:-

- Request that their ballot paper be posted to an address other than that appearing on the electoral register.
- Appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf.

All applications to make changes to the existing absent voting standing lists and new applications for absent/proxy votes will require to be submitted to the Electoral Registration Officer, Hillside House, Laurehill, Stirling, FK7 9JQ no later than 5.00 pm on Wednesday 3 April 2002 (11 days before polling day).

c. When issuing ballot papers to every local government elector in the register of electors the Returning Officer will place a mark on the register (or on the list of absent voters) against the number of the elector to denote that a ballot paper has been issued to that elector, without showing the particular ballot paper issued.

The elector's number will be entered on the counterfoil of the ballot paper and the ballot paper will be stamped with the official mark.

d. The ballot papers will be dispatched using first class royal mail on Friday 5 April 2002 giving 8 clear days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, bank holidays and polling day) for electors to complete and return postal ballot papers.

Candidates, Election Agents and one other representative appointed by the Candidate will be entitled to be present at the issue of the postal ballot papers.

e. Electors will require to return their ballot papers to the Returning Officer by 5.00 pm on Thursday 18 April 2002.

This can be done by:-

- Returning the ballot paper by post in the reply-paid envelope.

-
- Delivering the ballot paper, in the envelope to Old Viewforth, Stirling
FK8 2ET (open from 9.00 am until 5.00 pm weekdays) or to Doune Library, Main Street, Doune (in the Ward).
 - f. The counting of all ballot papers returned to the Returning Officer by the close of the poll (5.00 pm) will take place at a location within the Ward on Thursday 18 April 2002 commencing at 7.00 pm.

All postal ballot paper envelopes received by the close of poll will be opened and the ballot papers counted. Candidates, Election Agents, Candidates' partners and Counting Agents will have the usual rights to attend and observe this process.

5. DIFFERENCES FROM A CONVENTIONAL POLL

The pilot scheme differs from a conventional poll in a number of respects.

- a. Most obviously no polling stations will be used at the election and any person voting in person either as an elector or as a proxy may do so only by post.
- b. Under Rule 18 of the Scottish Local Elections Rules 1986 a postal vote must be accompanied by a declaration of identity, signed by the voter and witnessed by a person known to the voter. The declaration must be included in the return envelope together with the ballot paper.

The pilot scheme proposes that both the declaration of identity and the separate ballot paper envelope be dispensed with making the voting procedure more "user friendly".

The current double envelope system for postal votes which goes with the declaration of identity is complicated and may deter some people from voting. Votes are often rejected because the elector fails to sign the declaration, get it witnessed or does not send the declaration back with the ballot paper. The existing postal vote system also disadvantages many people, particularly those living on their own; who may find it difficult to get someone to witness their signature.

- c. Under the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001 electors and proxies on standing lists can apply to the Electoral Registration Officer to make changes to their existing absent votes up to 5.00 pm, eleven days before the election. New postal and proxy applications can be made up to 5.00 pm, six days before the election.

To allow electors sufficient time to receive their ballot papers and return them, the scheme proposes that all applications (changes to standing lists and new applications) should be submitted to the Electoral Registration Officer no later than 5.00 pm, eleven days before the election. All ballot papers can then be sent out 8 days before the election.

-
- d. Regulation 78 of the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001 makes provision for the Returning Officer to issue a replacement ballot paper to an elector who has not received his/her ballot paper by the third day before the day of the poll. An application by an elector (whether or not in person) to the Returning Officer for a replacement ballot paper requires to include evidence of the voter's identity. Such an application requires to be made before 5.00 pm on the day before the day of the poll.

This regulation applies to elections for membership of the House of Commons and the European Parliament but as yet has not been extended to Local Government Elections in Scotland. The scheme proposes that the provision to allow the Returning Officer to issue replacement ballot papers under prescribed circumstances should be extended to this Local Government election.

If the pilot application is approved an Order will be required to amend or disapply existing election rules to give effect to the changes in electoral procedure.

We understand that the rules, which will require to be looked at, are –

Scottish Local Election Rules 1986, as amended
Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001

6. PRACTICAL STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO MAKE THE PILOT WORK

- a. Experienced election staff will issue the postal ballot papers.
- b. The voting instructions to accompany the ballot papers will be printed in a large font and be in "plain English".
- c. Early discussions will be held with Consignia to explore the possibility of having special sorting arrangements for the postal vote envelopes.
- d. On election day posters will be displayed at the Polling Places normally used in the Ward, advising electors that ballot papers have been issued by post and that for votes to be counted the Returning Officer must receive ballot papers by 5.00 pm on that day.
- e. A number of actions will be taken to explain and promote the new voting arrangements and explain them to the electorate. These are outlined in Section 8.

7. ADDITIONAL COSTS/SAVINGS ARISING FROM RUNNING THE PILOT SCHEME

The costs of the pilot scheme are estimated to be slightly more expensive than a conventional election, but not greatly so.

The costs fall into three main categories -

- a. Polling Costs – printing ballot papers and postal vote stationery, staff costs associated with issuing and receiving postal votes, and the Count and postages (both ways).
- b. Advertising – press advertising, printing/delivering leaflets and questionnaires.
- c. Evaluation – preparation of a report on the pilot for submission to the Scottish Executive.

Some of these costs will be offset to some extent by not incurring costs on hiring polling places, employing presiding officers and polling clerks and the collection and delivery of polling booths. If this pilot was extended across the Stirling Council area there would be scope for economies of scale.

8. EXPLAINING/PROMOTING THE NEW ELECTORAL ARRANGMENTS IN THE PILOT

Various methods will be used to communicate the new electoral arrangements to the electorate and all other interested parties.

These will include:-

- a. Delivering a leaflet to every household within the Ward explaining the new electoral arrangements.
- b. Using the poll card format to advise all electors of the electoral arrangements.
- c. Amendments to the Notice of Election, Statement of Persons Nominated and Notice of Poll to reflect the all postal ballot.
- d. Advertising within Local Council Offices, Post Offices, Libraries and other public buildings in the Ward in advance of the election.
- e. Advertising in local newspapers, community newspapers and local radio station.
- f. Briefing political parties and any independent Candidates standing at the election.

9. PREVIOUS/FUTURE ELECTORAL INNOVATIONS

Stirling Council's Scheme of Establishment for Community Councils agreed, in June 1997, and the elections to Community Councils that followed have transformed the nature and composition of Community Councils in the Stirling Council Area. The system of election was radically changed to allow for single transferable vote and "all-postal" ballots. This was intended to encourage greater turnout by making voting more convenient and accessible.

This proved extremely successful, leading to turnouts in some cases above 66%. Since these elections were introduced, more than 27,000 citizens have received ballot papers for Community Council elections. In addition, every area of Stirling Council has an active Community Council with more than 90% of Community Councillors elected.

Citizens in the Stirling Council area seem to like voting by post. At the General Election in 2001, 97.4% of the postal ballot papers issued were returned. The all-postal voting pilot would build on the successful Community Council experience.

A postal ballot is also to be used in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Elections later in 2002 based on five 5 wards spread across four Councils in the national park area. The Returning Officer for Stirling Council is the Returning Officer for the National Park.

10. SECRECY AND INTEGRITY OF THE VOTING ARRANGMENTS

Every effort will be made to maintain the secrecy and integrity of the ballot at all times and returned ballot paper envelopes will be held in secure conditions.

A number of local authorities in England and Wales have conducted pilot schemes, including all postal ballots. There is no evidence to suggest that there was any increase in personation or electoral malpractice as a result of the pilot procedures. Any concerns about the secrecy of the ballot within a household or the scope for personation seemed to be outweighed by the positive feedback from electors regarding the simplicity of the voting process and increased access.

The pilot scheme will receive attention from the local media and political parties who will no doubt wish to scrutinise the process.

Section 5(9) of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002 requires any local authority undertaking a pilot electoral scheme to prepare a report on the scheme for submission to the Scottish Ministers and publication in the local area. This report will include an assessment of whether the procedures provided under the scheme led to any incidence of, or increase in, personation or any other electoral offences or any other malpractice in connection with elections.

The day after the Count, a postal questionnaire will be sent to 20% of electors in the Ward asking them for their views on the process. The questionnaire will be simple but comprehensive. It will address such issues as –

- Did the elector receive their ballot paper and if so, when?
- Did the elector return the ballot paper?
- Was the elector happy with the voting procedure?
- Did the elector think that voting by post was secure?

-
- If voting arrangements changed in the future which method of voting would the elector prefer?
 - The elector would be given the opportunity to add any other comments on the electoral process/procedures used.

The returned questionnaires will be analysed and used to assist the evaluation process.

The Returning Officer will also have a meeting after the by-election with the Candidates and the political parties to seek their views on the electoral pilot.

11. BENEFITS OF AN ALL POSTAL BALLOT

The benefits of an all postal ballot include –

- a. Increasing accessibility to the democratic process. All postal voting will be attractive to elderly electors who might have difficulty getting to a polling station, parents with small children, people who work long hours and carers who might have difficulty leaving dependent relatives.

All postal voting will also make it easier to vote in the rural areas where currently some electors have to travel a considerable distance to get to a polling place.

- b. Ensuring equal accessibility for all voters. Some polling places have better disabled access than others and are more conveniently located in a Ward. If all electors receive a personally addressed ballot paper sent to their home then they would all receive the same level of access.
- c. Simplifying the voting process. The proposal to dispense with the declaration of identity should make voting more user friendly. The requirement to sign and get the declaration witnessed always leads to votes being rejected.
- d. Making voting more attractive to electors who currently do not vote. Electors who are entitled to vote but do not currently exercise this right might be encouraged to do so if they have a ballot paper sent to them at their home.
- e. Increasing turnout at elections. Turnout in the Council areas in England and Wales who have tried pilot postal ballot schemes have increased substantially.

Electoral turnouts in the Stirling Council area have been extremely high in recent years. However at the two by-elections held to-date within Stirling Council in the Dunblane and Highland Wards, turnouts were down on previous elections.

-
- f. Savings could be made in the cost of organising elections if the postal ballot was extended across the Council area.

12. EVALUATION

After the by-election has taken place the Council will prepare a full report on the pilot in accordance with the guidance issued by the Scottish Executive.

The Council will also co-operate fully with the Electoral Commission's evaluation of the pilot.

APPENDIX A (ii)

THE STIRLING COUNCIL (ALL POSTING VOTING SCHEME) ORDER 2002



HAVE YOUR SAY

Teith Ward By-Election 18 April 2002 **Stirling Council Postal Voting Satisfaction Survey**

- ✓ The Teith Ward By-Election held on Thursday April 18 2002 was conducted by means of an all postal ballot. This meant there were none of the usual polling stations and voters could register their vote by posting their completed ballot papers to Viewforth or by putting them into the ballot boxes provided at Doune library or at the Council at Viewforth, Stirling.
- ✓ This is your opportunity to have your say and let Stirling Council know what you think about this method of voting.

- ✓ Your views are important as they will help the Council when planning future elections.
- ✓ The survey should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete.