

LGBCS Paper 2505**Strategy Seminar Options****Purpose / Background**

1. At its meeting 11 September 2019 the Commission discussed holding an event dedicated to consideration of the strategic context affecting the work of the Commission, which could involve inviting stakeholders or others with expertise relevant to the work of the Commission to attend, give presentations, or take part in discussions. The Commission discussed possible themes and asked the Secretariat to prepare a paper with options for the Commission to consider.
2. Following further discussions between the Chair, the Deputy Chair and the Secretariat, this paper discusses options for the Commission to consider in regards to the possible aims, themes, format and participants of such an event or events.

Discussion**Potential Goals**

3. The Commission will wish to consider its broad goals in deciding the themes, format and potential participants or invitees for an event or series of events it holds outside its normal meetings. Some aims the Commission may wish to consider include:
 - providing the Commission with an opportunity to explore and reflect on the principles underlying its work, thereby demonstrating its commitment to those principles;
 - giving further consideration to the Commission's principles in the context of prospective legislative changes which may allow the Commission to recommend 1 to 5 member wards;
 - exploring particular themes of interest and relevance to the Commission;
 - developing relationships with stakeholders such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), by creating opportunities for them to inform themselves of, and contribute to, the Commission's thinking outside questions directly relating to a particular review. This could be useful when considering changing methodology in future;
 - bringing together others with expertise which is relevant to the work of the Commission, for example: academics with expertise in local government; and current or former councillors or council officials.

Potential Themes

4. The Commission may wish to explore particular themes which contribute to achieving its aims. Examples of possible themes include:
 - Multi-member wards:
 - reflection on why these were instituted; and what evidence there is that they have "met their goals";

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- how do multi-member wards affect councillor workload? Do councillors share workload in particular ways? (e.g. on geographic, political party or other lines?);
 - how do members of the public feel about multi-member wards?
 - If 2 and 5 member wards are introduced, what should the Commission's attitude be to using them rather than 3 or 4 member wards (they would greatly increase the number of possible ward designs in a council area)?
 - The introduction of 1-member wards means that for some parts of a council area, seats would not be allocated in proportion to votes for political parties in the way that multi-member wards provide for. To what, if any, extent should this affect the Commission's future considerations?
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- What does "effective and convenient local government" mean?
 - Communities and local ties:
 - how are communities defined?
 - what constitutes "local ties"?
 - Is the Scottish Government's "Place principle" relevant here?
 - how do boundaries help or hinder engagement with communities?
 - What are meaningful communities in the context of boundary design?
 - Population trends and movement:
 - are demographic changes affecting or likely to affect areas differently? Is this likely to affect councillor workload and should this be considered in regards to future councillor numbers?
 - what are the causes of differences in levels of electoral registration or differences between forecast electorate versus actual electorate? Should we change the way we forecast electorate?
 - is individual electoral registration leading to underrepresentation of some groups, such as students?
 - should differences in approaches taken by universities to student electoral registration affect the Commission's considerations?

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- Public Awareness of the Commission and its work.
- What should the minimum and maximum council size be?
- Councillor workload – does online engagement increase or decrease councillor workload?
- “Best Practice in Boundary Design”

Potential Formats

5. The Commission will wish to consider which formats would be best suited to facilitating discussions, and attracting those who could make significant contributions. The frequency, timing and duration of events will be relevant here.
6. Some options include:
 - arranging a series of seminars or workshops to which academics could be invited to give short presentations;
 - a full day workshop where the Commission invites academics to submit abstracts, for example under a general banner or theme like “Best Practice in Boundary Design”
 - breakfast meetings;
 - late afternoon or early evening shorter events;
 - dinner or cheese & wine reception in the evening, with a meeting the next day;
 - hosting and publicising public lectures on a topic or topics, and inviting stakeholders and other interested parties;
 - a full day with speakers in the morning, deliberation in the afternoon, with a public lecture the previous evening before the first one (or every other one).
7. The Commission may choose to hold an initial event, and reflect upon it before arranging a series of future events.

Potential Participants

8. There are a variety of participants the Commission could seek to engage. For example:
 - COSLA;
 - Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE);

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- The Improvement Service;
- University research centres ;
- Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE);
- Academics with an interest in local government, community or electoral systems;
- Current or former councillors or council officials;
- National Records of Scotland;
- The Electoral Commission;
- The Electoral Management Board;

The Commission will naturally wish to reflect on what the perceived benefits of participation in its events would be to potential invitees.

Other Considerations

9. In addition to hosting events, the Commission may choose to engage in research related to the themes discussed: to inform itself prior to hosting events, as an outcome of its events, and to inform future events. Such research could involve work done by the Secretariat, commissioning surveys from polling companies, or by inviting tenders for academic research.
10. The Commission will wish to bear in mind the resource implications of any events it may choose to hold, with regard to the workload of the Secretariat and the costs associated with hosting events or commissioning research. This would form an element of its corporate planning. The Secretariat has provisionally allocated £25,000 for this in 2019–20, based on estimate of the costs of c. £16,000 for a survey from a polling company, plus additional provision for other potential costs such as venue hire. The Secretariat will revise its cost estimates following the Commission's consideration of its options.
11. The Commission may wish to consider how formal the discussions or events it may have will be; and, if appropriate, how to record any learning outcomes. The Commission may choose, for example: to record and share summaries of discussions or seminars with participants, to publish a series of outcome papers, to collate summaries and present a report for publication, or to publish any research it commissions. The Commission will also wish to discuss its intended outcomes with potential invitees.

Conclusion

12. The Commission is invited to consider the ideas and options set out in this paper.

Secretariat
October 2019