

Automatic voter registration – Motion as adjusted approved.

14 Councillor Alex Kerr, seconded by Councillor Hepburn, moved that:-

“Council firmly believes that a strong democracy is the foundation stone on which the most prosperous and free societies that have existed throughout history have been built. Council further believes that ensuring the largest proportion of citizens possible are able to take part in the democratic process, known as “democratic well-being” is crucial to ensuring the long-term strength of any democratic system. Council understands the additional barriers that those from more deprived backgrounds face in engaging with the democratic process with the Fraser of Allander institute finding a significant gap in participation between individuals that considered themselves in good health and those that considered themselves in bad health.

Council deplores the introduction of voter ID legislation by the UK Government which requires those taking part in Westminster elections to show photographic identification to vote in a polling station. Council notes the Electoral Commissions report into the May 2023 Local Elections in England which took place under the voter ID rules which found hundreds of thousands of people could be excluded from voting in a UK general election because of new rules. Council further notes the reports finding that this would have a disproportionate impact on poorer people, those with disabilities and from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Council notes that the Scottish Government passed amendments to the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act at the Scottish Parliament following consultation to enable the possibility of similar automatic voter registration pilots being pursued at a local authority level with a view to widening participation at Scottish and Local levels.

Council considers this would meet the aims of increasing democratic well-being by widening the pool of those eligible to vote and removing unnecessary barriers from participation in the democratic process to some of the most deprived communities. Council further believes the success of such pilots would highlight the benefits of taking an approach which opens up democracy, as opposed to inadvertently closing routes into participation through implementation of unnecessary voter ID legislation which creates barriers to participation.

Council notes Glasgow City Council’s success in the area of using data to increase participation – particularly with Glasgow’s pilot canvass which was cited by the Electoral Commission as best practice with findings being used to inform UK wide changes to the canvass. Council believes that given this track-record of success that Glasgow City Council should volunteer as a lead pilot location for an automatic voter registration pilot with the Scottish Government.

Council further notes the low turnout at recent by-elections and reflects that more visible methods to raise awareness of elections for citizens could have assisted in improving turnout. Council recognises that there has been a blanket ban on election advertising for some time but believes a partial repeal of this ban could be explored with the aim to increase democratic engagement.

Council therefore requests that Officers put forward the Glasgow as a location for an automatic voter registration pilot with the Scottish Government; and agrees to bring a paper to the Wellbeing, Equalities, Communities, Culture and Engagement City Policy Committee within the next two cycles before summer recess 2025 to explore the possibility of this and report back on other ways including the use of data that the Council could use to increase democratic participation and wellbeing.”

Bailie Lalley, seconded by Councillor Mooney, moved as an amendment that:-

- (1) at the first paragraph delete all after “Council firmly believes” and insert:

“that a strong and inclusive democracy is a foundation of a fair society, and that increasing voter participation—particularly among underrepresented groups—strengthens democratic legitimacy and wellbeing.”;

- (2) at the second paragraph delete in full and insert:

“Council acknowledges that changes to voter ID rules for UK parliamentary elections have raised concerns about potential barriers to participation. Council believes that steps should be taken to ensure all eligible citizens are supported to vote, and that targeted support should be made available to those at risk of exclusion.”;

- (3) at the fourth paragraph “removing unnecessary barriers”, insert:

“and ensuring that proposals are underpinned by robust planning, safeguards, and community engagement.”;

- (4) at the fifth paragraph referencing Glasgow City Council’s success insert at the end:

“Council further believes any pilot should involve close collaboration with Electoral Registration Officers and local community groups to ensure delivery is tailored to local needs.”;

- (5) after the fifth paragraph insert the following new paragraph:

“Council believes that any automatic voter registration pilot must be underpinned by a clear implementation framework and appropriate resourcing. Council further believes that efforts to improve democratic participation must be supported by enhanced civic education, outreach work with communities experiencing low turnout—including young people, disabled citizens, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities—and collaboration with third sector organisations already working to engage underrepresented voters.”;

- (6) after new paragraph above insert the following additional paragraph:

“Council believes that improving access to voting must go hand-in-hand with maintaining public trust in the electoral system, and that measures aimed at widening participation should be implemented in a way that enhances transparency, security, and confidence in electoral outcomes.”;

- (7) at the final paragraph after “increase democratic participation and wellbeing,” insert:

“including civic education initiatives and targeted community outreach,” ; and

- (8) add at end of the final paragraph:

“Council also agrees to explore the possibility of revising existing restrictions on public election advertising in a limited and controlled way, with safeguards to ensure fairness, transparency, and cost-effectiveness.”

Bailie Carroll, seconded by Councillor Anderson, moved as an amendment that:-

- (1) at the second paragraph beginning “Council deplores...”, between “...new rules.” and “Council further notes...”, add:

“Council notes the research indicated that 10% of those who did not vote was due to Voter ID restrictions.”;

- (2) at the end of the second paragraph, add:

“Council affirms their opposition to Voter ID legislation.”;

- (3) after the fifth paragraph ending “...with the Scottish Government.”, insert the following additional paragraph:

“Council specifically notes s44(3) of the Scottish Elections Act 2025 which recognises that funding for democratic engagement may cover automatic voter registration at schools, colleges and universities. Council believes that, if city-wide automatic voter registration is not taken forward, as a minimum the Scottish Government should work with Glasgow City Council to pilot automatic voter registration in the city’s council-run schools, coupled with in-school efforts to promote democratic engagement, ahead of Scottish and local elections in 2026 and 2027.”; and

- (4) after the final paragraph, insert the following additional paragraph:

“Council requests that the Convener for Open Government write to each of Glasgow’s MPs to confirm their positions on Voter ID requirements for Westminster Elections, and what they will do to address disenfranchisement thanks to Voter ID. Council also requests the Convener to write to the Minister for Democracy Rushanara Ali to express our dismay that Voter ID continues to be policy for Westminster elections, and urge her to remove this barrier to elections for voters.”

During the debate Councillor Alex Kerr, Bailie Lalley and Bailie Carroll, with the agreement of their seconders, agreed to combine their motion and amendments resulting in the following adjusted motion:-

“Council firmly believes that a strong democracy is the foundation stone on which the most prosperous and free societies that have existed throughout history have been built. Council further believes that ensuring the largest proportion of citizens possible are able to take part in the democratic process, known as "democratic well-being" is crucial to ensuring the long-term strength of any democratic system. Council understands the additional barriers that those from more deprived backgrounds face in engaging with the democratic process with the Fraser of Allander institute finding a significant gap in participation between individuals that considered themselves in good health and those that considered themselves in bad health.

Council deplores the introduction of voter ID legislation by the UK Government which requires those taking part in Westminster elections to show photographic identification to vote in a polling station. Council notes the research indicated that 10% of those who did not vote was due to Voter ID restrictions. Council affirms their opposition to Voter ID legislation.”

Council notes the Electoral Commissions report into the May 2023 Local Elections in England which took place under the voter ID rules which found hundreds of thousands of people could be excluded from voting in a UK general election because of new rules. Council further notes the reports finding that this would have a disproportionate impact on poorer people, those with disabilities and from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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Council notes that the Scottish Government passed amendments to the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act at the Scottish Parliament following consultation to enable the possibility of similar automatic voter registration pilots being pursued at a local authority level with a view to widening participation at Scottish and Local levels.

Council considers this would meet the aims of increasing democratic well-being by widening the pool of those eligible to vote and removing unnecessary barriers from participation in the democratic process to some of the most deprived communities. Council further believes the success of such pilots would highlight the benefits of taking an approach which opens up democracy, as opposed to inadvertently closing routes into participation through implementation of unnecessary voter ID legislation which creates barriers to participation.

Council notes Glasgow City Council's success in the area of using data to increase participation - particularly with Glasgow's pilot canvass which was cited by the Electoral Commission as best practice with findings being used to inform UK wide changes to the canvass. Council believes that given this track-record of success that Glasgow City Council should volunteer as a lead pilot location for an automatic

voter registration pilot with the Scottish Government.

Council further notes the low turnout at recent by-elections and reflects that more visible methods to raise awareness of elections for citizens could have assisted in improving turnout. Council recognises that there has been a blanket ban on election advertising for some time but believes a partial repeal of this ban could be explored with the aim to increase democratic engagement.

Council specifically notes s44(3) of the Scottish Elections Act 2025 which recognises that funding for democratic engagement may cover automatic voter registration at schools, colleges and universities. Council believes that Glasgow City Council should work with the Scottish Government to pilot automatic voter registration in the city's council-run schools, coupled with in-school efforts to promote democratic engagement, ahead of Scottish and local elections in 2026 and 2027.

Council therefore requests that Officers put forward the Glasgow as a location for an automatic voter registration pilot with the Scottish Government; and agrees to bring a paper to the Wellbeing, Equalities, Communities, Culture and Engagement City Policy Committee within the next two cycles before summer recess 2025 to explore the possibility of this and report back on other ways including the use of data that the Council could use to increase democratic participation and wellbeing.

Council further requests that the Convener for Open Government write to each of Glasgow's MPs to confirm their positions on Voter ID requirements for Westminster Elections, and what they will do to address disenfranchisement thanks to Voter ID. Council also requests the Convener to write to the Minister for Democracy Rushanara Ali to express our dismay that Voter ID continues to be policy for Westminster elections, and urge her to remove this barrier to elections for voters."

The motion, as adjusted, was unanimously approved.