

MEDIA RELEASE

29 October 2025

DAYTIME COUNT CONFIRMED FOR 2026 SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION

The Convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB) has the power to make Directions to Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) across Scotland on the delivery of Scottish Parliament Elections.

Following consultation with ROs, EROs and the Electoral Commission, Malcolm Burr, Convener of the Board, has issued a set of Directions for the Scottish Parliament Election on 7 May 2026 and said:

“Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers in this country have a history of delivering results in which voters, candidates and our institutions can have full confidence. The Directions I make today, with the full support of ROs and EROs, will protect that reputation, promoting resilience and giving clarity to voters and candidates across the Scotland about how the election processes will be run.

In addition to the usual administrative Directions, such as when postal votes will be issued, I am directing that votes are to be counted on the day following the polls rather than overnight. This will add resilience to a complex process.”

Following the close of polls for the Scottish Parliament Election, votes will be counted on Friday 8 May 2026, rather than overnight. This measure will support increased public engagement while increasing staff availability and recognising the operational complexities of the Election Count.

“Counting during the day allows the use of well-rested staff with quick access to more resources, people and support facilities. Our Counts are always accurate but working in the day removes some risks, reduces costs and lets us declare the results when more people are engaged.”

The proposed timing has been discussed with political parties, MSPs and at the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament at their meeting in September.

Other Directions, to give consistency to the electoral process, cover the colour of the ballot papers, the use of an official security mark, the dates when poll cards and postal votes are issued and the way papers should be numbered.

The EMB has taken account of lessons from previous elections, including the challenges experienced in the UK Parliament Election in 2024.

Further information on the rationale behind moving to a daytime count can be found on the EMB website (<https://www.emb.scot/downloads/file/1148/directions-sp-election-2026>); the Direction for Delivery is under Workstream 9).

Notes to Editors

1. The EMB, created in 2011, has a statutory role in coordinating delivery of elections across Scotland, promoting best practice and keeping the interests of the voter at the centre of all planning.
2. Formal Directions around Scottish Parliament Elections have been made by the Convener of the EMB since 2016. Directions covering Scottish Local Government Elections have been made since 2012.
3. Directions ensure consistency in voter-facing parts of the Election, such as the colour of ballot papers, and appropriate contingency planning to support robust operations.
4. Daytime counts are standard for Local Government Elections in Scotland. There was a daytime Count at the last Scottish Parliament election in May 2021.
5. The Directions for the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election are available on the EMB website at www.emb.scot
6. The Scottish Parliament elections are the most complex electoral events in Scotland. In 2021 there were over 4 million registered electors, more than 1 million of whom had a postal vote, each using two ballot papers to choose representatives for a local Constituency and their Region.

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