EMB | Electoral Management Board for Scotland

MEDIA RELEASE

4 November 2026

NATIONAL DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONFIRMED FOR THE 2027 SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCIL) ELECTIONS

The Convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB) has today issued Directions and recommendations to Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) for the Scottish Local Government (Council) Elections on Thursday 6 May 2027.

The 14 Directions ensure consistency across Scotland's 32 council areas, providing clarity for voters, candidates and political parties while supporting resilient and secure electoral processes.

Following consultation with ROs, EROs and the Electoral Commission, Malcolm Burr, Convener of the Board, said:

"Our dedicated Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer teams across Scotland have a strong record of delivering elections in which voters, candidates and our democratic institutions can have full confidence."

"These Directions and recommendations build on that experience, giving a common framework so voters and candidates can rely on the same high standards of electoral administration wherever they are in Scotland."

"Consistency is helpful for voters, candidates and administrators. Common arrangements for ballot paper design, postal voting and key timetable dates make the process easier to understand, support national communication campaigns and allow everyone involved to plan with confidence."

The Directions cover many voter-facing parts of the election: the colour and security marks of ballot papers, the publication of election notices and the dispatch dates for poll cards and postal votes. They also set out common arrangements for counting votes, declaring results and publishing detailed voting information after the election.

The EMB always emphasises accessibility, encouraging Returning Officers to build on improvements introduced at the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election. These included

audio ballot papers, additional tactile voting devices to help those with sight loss and enhanced training for polling staff.

The 2027 elections will again use electronic scanners to count votes under the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. As in previous council elections, votes will be verified and counted on the day following the poll, Friday 7 May 2027.

Malcolm Burr added:

"Elections are complex operations involving many organisations and thousands of staff. Common standards and coordinated planning help manage risks, make effective use of resources and strengthen resilience."

"Accessibility is equally important. Every voter should be able to participate with dignity and as independently as possible, with appropriate assistance available where needed."

"Our overriding priority is to deliver accurate results through processes that are accessible, transparent, secure and trusted."

The Directions reflect lessons learned from recent elections and have been issued ahead of the six-month period before polling day, in accordance with "the Gould Principle", giving plenty of notice for all who need to plan and prepare.

The full Directions are available at www.emb.scot .

Notes to Editors

1. The EMB, created in 2011 and becoming a body corporate in 2026, is independent of governments, with 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. It reports to the Scottish Parliament.
2. 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.
5. At the last Scottish Local Government Election in 2022 there were over 4.25 million registered electors in Scotland, over 984,000 of whom had a postal vote.
6. Across Scotland's 32 local authorities. There are 1226 councillors elected across 355 wards. Most wards (344) have either 3 or 4 councillors depending on the size of the electorate.
7. 1 and 2-member wards were introduced under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 to prevent island communities from being artificially merged with mainland areas

just to satisfy minimum voter numbers. There are 7 wards for Island communities that have 2 members. North Ayrshire Council is unique in holding both the only 1-member ward (Arran) and all three of the country's 5-member wards.

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