

Engender Response to Scottish Government Consultation on Proposal to Allow Proxy Voting for Councillors

28th November 2024

Question 1. Do you agree that an explicit provision should be introduced to allow a councillor to arrange for their vote to be cast by proxy?

Yes

No

Question 2. Do you agree with the optional criteria which could be applied by a local authority to allow for proxy voting:

- i. *maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, shared parental leave or adoption leave;*
- ii. *complications arising from pregnancy, childbirth, miscarriage or baby loss;*
- iii. *serious long-term illness or injury;*
- iv. *bereavement;*
- v. *attending to a person who is near the end of their life;*
- vi. *any other reason subject to agreement of the full Council.*

Yes

No

Question 3: Are there any further comments that you wish to make on the proposal to allow for proxy voting (300 words maximum)

Women are underrepresented in local government as just 35% of Scotland's councillors. Progress towards equality at local level has been glacial, and at the current rate it is likely to take until at least 2037 for women to be equally represented in councils.

Proxy voting is likely to improve accessibility and would reflect a move towards more flexible, modern working practices for councils. We know that normal council working patterns can sometimes present particular barriers for individuals with caring responsibilities, who are disproportionately women. This barrier to

participation was highlighted in our “Making it Happen for 2027: Transforming Local Democracy for Women” research. It is of note that of the 6 proposed criteria for councils to consider granting a proxy vote, several are likely to have a disproportionate impact on women, including those relating to maternity/parental leave; those relating to pregnancy, childbirth, miscarriage or baby loss; and attending to a person who is near the end of their life. It is crucial that flexible practices like proxy voting are introduced to ensure that councillors are not excluded due to their caring roles.

We note that the current approach would allow councils to choose whether to adopt proxy voting. Our preference would be for all councillors to have a guaranteed right to proxy voting rather than risk some areas not adopting the policy. In the absence of a universal approach we support the current proposal and would encourage strong guidance and encouragement for councils to adopt proxy voting. Women’s underrepresentation in local politics means that women councillors must not face additional barriers to their equal participation. With widespread and considered application this proposal has the potential to positively impact women’s councillors ability to fulfil their role and to have equal influence over decision-making.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ABOUT US

Engender is a leading feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to secure women’s social, political and economic equality and realise women’s rights in Scotland. We aim to make visible the impact of sexism on women and wider society and work at Scottish, UK and international level to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.