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Dear Miss Ferguson

Local Health Care Bill – Consultation Document

I refer to the consultation document issued by the Scottish Government seeking views as to whether a Local Healthcare Bill should include provision for direct elections to NHS Boards and, if so, what form these might take.

North Lanarkshire Council has already given consideration to this issue and, while acknowledging difficulties in the local responsibility of Health Boards and their national accountability, the Council identified also difficulties in public confusion on a plethora of separate elected bodies. Against that background the Council concluded that the issue could best be addressed by a further acknowledgement of the local elected mandate of members of local authorities with, possibly, the non-professional membership of Health Boards being drawn exclusively from members of local authorities appointed by the relevant Councils or, alternatively, consisting solely of members of local authorities appointed by the relevant Councils and local MSPs. This, the Council concluded, would ensure a degree of local accountability while recognising the importance of partnership links and providing, also, for a sufficiently long tenure of office and for the Board's responsibilities for the area as a whole.

North Lanarkshire Council would, accordingly, recommend the foregoing arrangement rather than direct elections – and for that reason detailed comments are not submitted on all of the questions relating solely to direct election. It is, however, the Council's view that, were direct elections to be introduced, eligibility criteria for both candidates and electors should reflect those for local government elections. There is no case for precluding candidates from standing as representatives of political parties – such a prohibition could only be calculated to increase the possibility of 'single issue' candidates and, in the view of the Council, if there is no case for excluding candidates standing as representatives of political parties for services such as social work, education and planning, it is hard to see that there is a special case with regard to health. Similarly, political party involvement can be of assistance in promoting equality and diversity and in clearly indicating the manifesto on which a candidate stands.

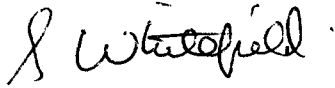
With regard to the mechanics of elections, the Council has noted that, with very limited restriction on the right to vote by post, only a minority of the electorate of North Lanarkshire have chosen to do so at recent elections. Given that, it would not appear that there is a case to preclude personal voting by way of polling places and ballot boxes.

With regard to remuneration, no case can be identified for withdrawing remuneration from elected members when this is currently considered appropriate for appointed members.

Finally with regard to questions 31 and 32, it is suggested that it would, rather, be appropriate to introduce provisions similar to those applying to elected members of the Council under the Ethical Standards legislation.

As you will have noted, North Lanarkshire Council welcomes the opportunity to comment and is fully committed to supporting and promoting public involvement in the planning and delivery of public services, including health services – and I should be obliged if you would note the foregoing as the Council's response to the consultation document.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Whitefield'.

Chief Executive