



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Evaluation of the Colinton All Postal Vote By-Election Pilot Scheme

Local Government



**EVALUATION OF THE COLINTON
ALL POSTAL VOTE BY-ELECTION
PILOT SCHEME**

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and



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SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- There is some evidence to suggest that turnout of voters was higher than it would have been if the scheme had not applied. However, the use of the postal-only ballot appears to have two conflicting impacts. For a significant minority who were apprehensive about the method, it appears to have somewhat depressed their normal tendency to vote. On the other hand, there does also appear to be a small proportion of the electorate who tend not to vote in other elections, but did cast their vote in the by-election, perhaps because it was a postal ballot.
- As a group, opponents of postal-only ballots were more likely to say they 'always' vote in General, Scottish and European Parliament elections, but they were less likely to have voted in the Colinton by-election. The most common reasons electors gave for not voting were that they forgot, were too busy, or were uninterested.
- There appears to be a small core of non-voters for whom the mechanism for casting their votes makes no difference to how likely they are to vote. Thus, although, postal voting may increase turnout, there is likely to be a minority that will not be swayed by any changes in the voting method.
- The materials sent to electors with their ballot papers were overwhelmingly recorded as the most common source of helpful information on how to cast their vote, cited by 76% of those aware of the by-election, with the efforts of the political parties and candidates mentioned by just 9%, and the media by 2%.
- The simplified procedure and the low number of ballot papers rejected, when considered alongside the high turnout, would suggest that an all postal poll provided a system which was straightforward and easy for voters to understand.
- While half of respondents felt that voting by post was open to fraud or abuse, no evidence was found to suggest that the pilot scheme actually resulted in an increase in personation or other malpractice. The post-election integrity check carried out by the Council was specifically designed as an additional security test. However, some level of concern does persist among the electorate and party workers that an all postal system is potentially less secure. This perception will require to be addressed if all postal polls are to be more widely used.
- The all postal process was considerably more expensive than a by-election carried out using conventional arrangements. It may be, however, that there would be some economies of scale were all postal elections to become more widely used.
- Around nine in ten (86%) voters said their overall experience of casting their vote in the by-election was 'good', including 61% who said it was *very good*. On the other hand, 7% said their experience was 'poor', including 4% who said it was *very poor*. Nearly all of those who said their experience was poor were also opposed to the use of postal-only ballots in future elections, a group comprising 5% of the electorate in Colinton.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Section 5 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002 gives Councils the opportunity to pilot innovative electoral systems in order to improve turnout, make voting more accessible and to secure administrative efficiencies.

Councils may apply to the Scottish Executive to run pilot schemes at local government elections. Applications may include proposals for new electoral arrangements relating to when and where voting can take place, the method used to cast votes, how votes are counted, and the provision of information about candidates. In addition, local authorities can make proposals for other arrangements carried out before or during the poll that they consider to be likely to facilitate or encourage voting generally and among particular groups such as older people, minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities.

If the Scottish Executive approves a pilot scheme an Order is made under the 2002 Act to give the pilot arrangements a legal basis.

The City of Edinburgh Council submitted an application to Scottish Executive Ministers on 25th August 2004 for approval to conduct an all-postal vote pilot in the Council's Colinton (No. 43) Ward. The application was granted and the Colinton all postal pilot by-election was held on 28th October 2004.

The Evaluation

The 2002 Act requires any council piloting new electoral arrangements to undertake an evaluation of it. Hitherto the Electoral Commission has also conducted an independent evaluation of pilot schemes approved.

The Commission's evaluation normally included a description of the scheme and an assessment of it against the following five criteria:

- The scheme's success or otherwise in facilitating voting or the counting of votes, or in encouraging voting or enabling voters to make informed choices at the elections;
- Whether the turnout of voters was higher than it would have been if the scheme had not applied;
- Whether voters found the procedures provided for their assistance by the scheme easy to use;
- Whether the procedures provided for by the scheme led to any increase in personation or other electoral offences, or in any other malpractice in connection with elections;
- Whether these procedures led to any increase in expenditure, or to any savings, by the authority.

The Commission recently determined that it was unable to support evaluation of any more all postal pilot schemes. As the Scottish Executive remains committed to independently evaluating Scottish election pilots, Stirling Council – who carried out Scotland’s first all postal pilot by-election in April 2002 – and MORI Scotland were commissioned by the Executive to undertake an independent evaluation of the Colinton all postal pilot scheme.

This report was brought together by the Scottish Executive’s Local Government and Public Services Reform Research Team and is a compilation of separate reports produced by Stirling Council and MORI Scotland. Bob Jack, Depute Returning Officer for Stirling Council, undertook an evaluation of the processes adopted for the pilot. His evaluation of the processes adopted by the City of Edinburgh Council is provided in chapter one. MORI Scotland was separately commissioned to conduct a post-election survey of Colinton residents. The findings of this survey are detailed in chapter two. The Conclusion draws on the findings from both reports.

CHAPTER ONE: PROCESSES

By the time the researcher commenced the evaluation the electoral process was already underway. Accordingly, it was not possible to observe the early stages of planning and preparation for the process nor indeed the critical stage of issue of the postal ballot packs. However, a very full and helpful briefing was provided by the Returning Officer's staff on the process adopted and the researcher was able to observe the opening of postal returns and the Count itself. The researcher was also able to attend the post-election debriefing convened by the Returning Officer and his staff with the candidates and agents. Copies of all relevant documentary material were provided, including the Returning Officer's own Evaluation Report and the independent surveys that are referred to in that document.

The following sections comprise the researcher's own independent evaluation of the pilot scheme. The format and evaluation criteria previously adopted by the Electoral Commission are followed.

APPLICATION AND SCHEME

At its meeting on 19th August 2004, the City of Edinburgh Council determined to apply to the Scottish Executive in terms of Section 5 of the Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002 to undertake an all postal electoral pilot in a by-election in its Colinton (No. 43) Ward, caused by the death of the incumbent Councillor.

The Scottish Executive approved the proposal and on 23rd September 2004 issued The City of Edinburgh Council (All Posting Voting Scheme) Order 2004 with a Commencement Date of 24th September 2004. The date of the by-election was Thursday 28th October 2004.

PILOT DESCRIPTION

This was the fourth time in Scotland that an all postal electoral pilot had taken place. The scheme approved for the by-election at Colinton drew on the experience of and lessons derived from the evaluations of previous all postal pilots. The details of the scheme are set out in the appendices to Edinburgh's own Evaluation Report and are described briefly in the following paragraphs.

Notice of the by-election was given on 24th September 2004 at the City Chambers, Edinburgh and published in the local press on 27th September 2004. The Closing Date for Nominations was 6th October 2004. Ballot papers were issued to electors commencing on 16 October 2004 to be returned not later than 5.00pm on 28th October 2004.

Prior to the issuing of ballot papers, during the week commencing 27th September 2004, the Returning Officer sent letters to each individual elector explaining the pilot and giving details on how to vote. As at conventional elections, electors could request that their ballot paper be sent to an address other than that at which they were registered or to appoint a proxy.

The ballot pack comprised a single-piece ballot paper and declaration of identity, together with instructions to electors, the ballot paper envelope 'A' and the return envelope 'B'. The ballot paper and declaration of identity were bar-coded, rather than marked with the elector's registration number. The ballot paper was water-marked rather than perforated with the usual 'official mark'. This arrangement proved to be highly efficient and, in the view of the evaluator, consideration should be given to its adoption for all postal ballots

The printing, assembly and issuing of the ballot pack were subcontracted to Electoral Reform Services (ERS) and Royal Mail. It had been intended that delivery to electors would commence on 16 October 2004 and be completed by 18th October 2004. In the event, due to some confusion about handover between ERS and Royal Mail, very few packs were in fact delivered on the 16 and the bulk were not delivered until 19th October 2004.

Electors were instructed to post their returns in time for them to be received by the 28th October 2004 deadline. Alternatively, ballot papers could be delivered to one of the three Assistance and Delivery Points (ADPs), two of which were in the ward and the third at the City Chambers. Training on the new arrangements and in particular issues relating to security and fraud, was given to those who staffed the ADPs.

The Returning Officer made arrangements to replace ballot papers accidentally spoilt or lost with re-issues provided that a request was made before 5pm two days before the close of poll, in the case of postal enquiries, and the day before the close of poll in the case of personal applications.

Ballot returns began to arrive on 20th October 2004, and arrangements were in place for a daily opening of returns at the City Chambers. The bar-codes (which were visible through the address window of the return envelope) were scanned to record returns. The process then followed the normal procedure for opening postal ballots. The return envelopes were opened to ensure that they had been properly returned with a signed declaration of identity and the corresponding ballot paper envelope. The ballot paper envelopes were then opened to check that they contained a corresponding ballot paper. The ballot papers were then counted face down into bundles of fifty. This process took place at pre-determined times during the week prior to the close of poll and in the presence of candidates' agents. Once counted, each day's ballot papers were sealed in a ballot box and securely stored in the City Chambers until the Count.

The Count took place at Edinburgh City Chambers at 5.00 pm on 28th October 2004, after the close of poll. The Count followed the normal procedure with stage one being verification that the number of ballot papers in each box tallied with the record of the opening of postal returns and stage two being the separation and counting of votes cast for each candidate. The result was declared at 6.30 pm.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

A formal pilot project plan was developed by the Returning Officer's staff and this detailed key project responsibilities and milestones. The Returning Officer also put in place mechanisms to assist in evaluating the success or otherwise of the pilot scheme. These included survey research among the electorate, post-election consultation meetings with candidates and political parties and discussion among those involved in the administration of the election.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

When the Council considered the proposal to apply to undertake a pilot the application was approved on division with the Labour administration (29) voting for and the Conservatives and other opposition parties (27) opposing the application.

All prospective candidates and political parties were informed of the pilot and the Returning Officer held a meeting with these groups to talk them through the new voting arrangements. A nomination pack was also provided to all prospective candidates. A post-election debriefing was held with candidates and agents on 1st November 2004. Notwithstanding previous political disagreements over the application for the postal pilot scheme, the overall conclusion of this meeting was that the pilot had been efficiently conducted and there were no significant problems reported that would have affected the poll to any material extent. Some concerns were, however, expressed about the initial delay in ballot packs being delivered, the cost of the all postal process and some questions about security of opened postal returns pending the Count.

Relationships between the Scottish Executive and the Council were considered to be good. Observers from the Scottish Executive attended key stages of the process. There was some concern on the part of the Returning Officer's staff that the Order allowing the pilot was only formally signed and issued the day before the Notice of Poll was due to be published. While at the end of the day this did not affect preparations or the conduct of the poll, it inevitably meant a level of unnecessary uncertainty and stress for those concerned.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND FEEDBACK

With the exception of a letter from the Returning Officer to each individual elector explaining the pilot and giving details on how to vote, publicity about the postal pilot was confined to that normally carried out in connection with a by-election. The Notice of Election and Notice of Poll were published in Council Offices and other public and community buildings in the ward as well as in the local press.

In fulfilling its requirement to evaluate the pilot scheme, the Council undertook a range of post-election consultations in the form of meetings among stakeholders including candidates, political parties and electoral

administrators. The views of the electorate were researched using survey samples and qualitative research as follows:

A telephone survey of a random sample of 500 of the electorate. This was jointly commissioned by the Council and the Scottish Executive and was carried out by MORI Scotland between 29th October and 2nd November 2004 (the main findings from this survey are contained in Chapter Two, below).

A post election integrity check was carried out by the Returning Officer's staff involving letters to 500 randomly selected voters seeking confirmation that they had in fact voted. Only 132 electors responded to the post-election integrity check and all confirmed that they had voted in the by-election.

IMPACT ON TURNOUT

The turnout was 61.1%. This was only 4.7% lower than Colinton's turnout at the 2003 all-Council election, which took place on the same day as elections to the Scottish Parliament. The turnout was significantly higher than that usually achieved in normal Council by-elections.

A very low number (4 papers or 0.1%) of ballot papers were rejected at the Count as unmarked or void for uncertainty. This compares very favourably with other elections. Only 36 postal returns (0.61%) were rejected as defective. Again, this compares favourably with other elections.

ACCESSIBILITY

In his initial letter to all electors, the Returning Officer explained the new voting arrangements. Electors were provided with a telephone hotline and were told that if anyone needed assistance they should contact the election office. Only 33 people availed themselves of this service.

The main issue in relation to accessibility related to prospective voters with visual impairment. Returning Officer's staff were available at the Assistance and Delivery Points and were prepared to visit homes to assist electors in completing their ballot papers and, in accordance with the Order, a voting device was made available at the Assistance and Delivery Points to assist those with sight impairments. No electors availed themselves of this assistance.

When considering accessibility more generally, party workers and agents also felt that the arrangements made and the period of time electors were given to cast their vote was satisfactory and facilitated accessibility.

SECURITY AND FRAUD

As mentioned previously, some party candidates and workers said that they thought an all-postal system was not secure. However, beyond this generalised concern, no evidence was found to suggest that the procedures

actually resulted in any increase in personation or other electoral offences, or any other malpractice in connection with elections. As regards security of the opened postal returns, this was handled in exactly the same way as postal ballots in a normal election. The opened ballots were handled face down and after counting were sealed in ballot boxes which were then securely stored prior to delivery to the Count.

COST

The cost of conducting the by-election using all-postal arrangements was £18,141 (the Council's Returning Officer has supplied full details in his evaluation report). This represented an increase of almost double the usual cost of a by-election being carried out using conventional arrangements.

In his own report the Council's Returning Officer indicates areas where costs could be reduced in the longer-term, including reducing advertising spend as people became more familiar with postal voting. Other social, non-financial benefits should be considered, such as the Council not having to close primary schools on the day of the election as would normally have been the case.

CHAPTER TWO: POST-ELECTION SURVEY OF COLINTON ELECTORS

This section of the report contains the findings of the post-election survey of Colinton residents conducted by MORI Scotland, jointly funded by City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Executive.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the post-election survey was to gather detailed information on the experience of, and attitudes to, the all-postal scheme piloted in the Colinton by-election. The specific objectives were to examine:

- The level of awareness that the by-election was taking place;
- The level of support for the use of all postal vote ballots for future elections, and whether this varied by age and/or other demographic factors;
- What information, if any, about the all-postal voting scheme electors found useful;
- Whether there were any systematic reasons for non-voting;
- The use and experience of official home visits and assisted delivery points.

METHODOLOGY

MORI interviewed 500 residents registered on the electoral roll in the ward of Colinton. All interviews were conducted by telephone between 29th October and 2nd November, 2004.

The sampling procedure involved several stages.

- Telephone number look-ups operate on surnames and addresses, thus the first stage was to ensure that, for each address listed, each surname only appeared once. This was to improve the efficiency of the telephone number look-up process. Where an individual address included more than one surname, each different name was included, since it was not known under which name the telephone number would be registered.
- An automated system was used to look up telephone numbers. Out of a total of 6,589 names and addresses, telephone numbers were successfully found for 3,114, a success rate of 47%.
- Telephone numbers were matched back to the original file, so that for each named elector at an address, the appropriate telephone number was appended to their record.
- A systematic random sample of 1,218 electors was drawn from this list, and this sample was read into the sample management system for the project. At each number, interviewers attempted to achieve an

interview with the named elector, with calls made over a range of times and days of the week. No substitutions were allowed.

The table below shows the outcome for each lead in the sample. As mentioned above, the sample was made up of 1,218 electors. Of these, 50 of the telephone numbers were bad numbers or the elector had moved. This left 1,168 eligible leads. Almost one in five electors refused (17%) and two in five (40%) were non-contact. This resulted in an overall response rate of 42%.

Table 1: Response Rates

Sample drawn	1,218	
Bad number/elector moved	50	
Eligible	1,168	
Refused	196	17%
Non-contact	472	40%
Interview achieved	500	42% ¹

It should be remembered at all times that a sample and not the entire population of Colinton residents has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances which means that not all differences may be statistically significant.

Where percentages do not sum to 100%, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories or multiple answers. Throughout the volume, an asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a percent.

AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION

The Colinton Ward has a tradition of high turnout at elections. The officially recorded turnout of 61% in the by-election reflected this, and was in line with the turnout in the 2003 Council election. However, the 2003 election was an unusual one, and may have been 'artificially' high, because it coincided with the elections for the Scottish Parliament. The most recent full Council election in Edinburgh, unaffected in this way (the 1999 elections saw the Council and Scottish Parliament votes cast on the same day too) was in 1995, when the turnout was 52%. Of course the context in 1995 was also unique, because it was the first election since the re-organisation of local government in Scotland, which produced unitary local government to replace the old District and Regional councils.

¹ Response rates to telephone surveys can be calculated in a number of ways. In the method used here, it was assumed that all telephone numbers from which a ringing tone was obtained, but no answer, was a valid and 'live' number. In other methods, numbers which persistently give no answer are considered to be out of scope, resulting in higher response rates.

Respondents to this survey were even more likely to have voted than the Colinton electorate as a whole – perhaps because, as voters engaged in the process, they were more willing to participate in the survey, or because of a degree of over-claim in whether they voted. Without checking back to the marked register, it is not possible to say which of these two factors is the more significant.

Very few respondents said they were unaware of the by-election (2%), and most of those aware of the by-election knew that it was postal-only (97%) – corresponding to 95% of the electorate. Awareness of how the votes could be cast was lower among the small number of respondents who said that they did not vote (86% of whom said they knew that it was a postal-only ballot).

More than eight in ten electors responding to the survey (85%) said they voted in the by-election, and their responses to other questions suggest that they are fairly consistent in their participation in elections. Electors in Colinton were most likely to say they always vote in General elections, but substantially less likely to say the same of European elections.

Table 2: How often do you vote in each of these types of election?

	General Election	Scottish Parliament	European Elections	Council elections
<i>Base: All who voted in the by-election (425)</i>	%	%	%	%
Always do	89	75	63	75
Normally do	9	16	18	21
Often don't	1	3	9	3
Never	1	5	10	1

Source: MORI

Non-participation in the by-election reflects people's likelihood of voting in elections generally. Thus those residents who did not vote in the recent by-election are significantly more likely to say they never vote in other elections. One in ten (11%) say they never vote in General elections rising to one in three (36%) non-voters in the by-election who state that they never vote in European Parliament elections.

Table 3: How often do you vote?

	General Elections	Scottish Parliament	European Elections	Council Elections
<i>Base: All who did not vote in the by-election (66)</i>	%	%	%	%
Always do	52	30	21	11
Normally do	33	38	30	41
Often don't	5	6	12	27
Never	11	26	36	21

Source: MORI

However, there is one group that does not fit this pattern – those who oppose the use of postal-only ballots in future elections. This group was more likely to say that they *always* vote in General elections (89% compared with 82% of those in support of postal-only ballots), *always* vote in Scottish Parliament elections (79% compared with 64% of supporters of postal-only ballots) and *always* vote in European elections (69% compared with 52%). Although there was no statistically significant difference in their claimed propensity to vote in Council elections, they were markedly less likely to say they voted in the by-election (83% said that they voted, compared with 92% of those who generally support the idea of postal-only ballots).

Table 4: How often do you vote?

	Support postal-only ballots	Oppose postal-only ballots
<i>Base: All (500)</i>	%	%
	Always vote	Always vote
General Elections	82	89
Scottish Parliament Elections	64	79
European Elections	52	69
Council Elections	64	72

Source: MORI

Prior to the by-election, relatively few voters in Colinton had experience of postal voting. Ninety-five per cent of those who said they voted in the 2001 General Election said they did so at a conventional polling station, while just 3% said they used a postal vote. Similarly, 90% of those who said they voted at the Scottish Parliament and Local elections in 2003 said they voted at a polling station, and just 6% said they did so by post. Of the remaining 4%, 1% voted by proxy and 3% voted but can't remember which method they used. Finally, 88% of those who said they voted in the 2003 European election said they voted at a polling station, with 7% once again saying they did so by post. Five percent voted, but could not remember which method they used.

The most common reason why residents said they did not vote in the Colinton by-election was that they forgot. Three in ten (29%) of those who did not vote say this is the reason. One in ten (11%) did not vote because they don't care about the local Council or were too busy and didn't get round to it. Five per cent of non-voters say they did not vote because they wanted to vote in the traditional way, by going to a polling station.

Table 5: People have given many different reasons for not voting in the by-election. How about you, why didn't you vote?

<i>Base: All who did not vote (66)</i>	%
I forgot	29
I just don't care about the local Council	11
Too busy/didn't get round to it	11
I'm just not interested in politics	8
You just can't trust politicians to keep their promises	8
I didn't know what the issues were	8
I really intended to vote but circumstances prevented me	6
I wanted to vote in the traditional way by going to a polling station	5
I was away during the by-election period	5
There was no point in voting because all the parties are the same	5
I haven't had any information from the candidates	5
There was no point in voting because the local Council can't do very much/can't change anything	5
I didn't know there was a by-election	3
Felt too much pressure/was inundated with mail/phone calls	3
I couldn't decide who to vote for	2
Other	9
None	2

Source: MORI

The reasons for not voting are broadly in line with findings from other MORI research where lack of interest in politics, lack of information from the candidates and circumstances on the day are among the key reasons why people don't vote.²

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Few electors say that they received helpful information about how to cast their vote from any source other than the material they received with their ballot papers. Three quarters say this provided them with helpful information (76%), rising to 80% of those who went on to vote, but falling to 47% of those that say they did not vote in the by-election. Of this latter group, around three in ten said that they did not receive any helpful information.

One in ten said that they received helpful information from the candidates or political parties (9%), and just 2% said that the media was a useful source.

² See 'Attitudes towards Voting and the Political Process', MORI for the Electoral Commission, 2003.

Table 6: What sources of information, if any, did you find helpful in explaining how to cast your vote in the by-election in Colinton?

<i>Base: All aware of by-election (491)</i>	%
Information with my ballot paper	76
From the political parties/candidates	9
Didn't get any helpful information	4
From other information sent by the Council	3
From friends and relatives	2
On local radio	1
In articles in the Evening News	1
Advertisements in the Evening News	1
At Edinburgh City Council offices	*
On T.V.	-
Via the Council's website	-
Other	1
Don't know	4
None/Nothing/No information received/needed	7

Source: MORI

Electors in Colinton recall receiving their ballot papers and accompanying information over a number of days from Saturday 16th October onwards, although as many as four in ten (38%) were unable to recall when their papers arrived. One in eight (12%) says they received their papers on Monday 18th October and one in seven (14%) on Tuesday 19th October. Three per cent of residents say they received their voting papers after Saturday 23rd October.

Table 7: You should have received your voting papers in the post several days before the election date. From what you remember, when did your voting papers arrive in the post?

<i>Base: All aware of by-election (491)</i>	%
On Saturday 16 th October	6
On Monday 18 th October	12
On Tuesday 19 th October	14
On Wednesday 20 th October	11
On Thursday 21 st October	9
On Friday 22 nd October	3
On Saturday 23 rd October	3
After Saturday 23 rd October	3
Voting papers did not arrive	*
Don't know	38

Source: MORI

REACTION TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

More than eight in ten Colinton residents who voted in the by-election (86%) rated their overall experience of voting by post in the by-election as *good*, including six in ten (61%) who rated their experience as *very good*. Fewer than one in ten residents rated their experience as *poor*, and sixteen times as many said their experience was *very good* as said it was *very poor*.

Table 8: How would you rate your overall experience of voting by post in this council by-election?

<i>Base: All who voted (425)</i>	%
Very good	61
Fairly good	25
Neither good nor poor	7
Fairly poor	3
Very poor	4
<i>Good</i>	86
<i>Poor</i>	7
<i>Net good</i>	80

Source: MORI

The experience of those who support the future use of postal only ballots was overwhelmingly positive in the by-election (78% saying it was *very good*, and a further 20% saying it was *fairly good*), but even those who oppose future postal only ballots generally had a positive experience this time (34% *very good* and 31% *fairly good*). Having said that, one in five of those who oppose future use of postal only ballots said their experience in the by-election was *poor*.

Electors were asked about their experience, or perception of, a number of different parameters of the process of postal voting. There is little difference in the balance of opinion expressed by those who voted, and the perceptions of those who did not vote in the by-election (although there is some difference in the intensity of views). However, there are substantial differences between the perceptions or experiences of those who support and those who oppose the future use of postal only ballots. This suggests that the kind of issues explored here have some relevance to people's support or opposition for the process, but is less significant in their decision on whether to participate.

Table 9: Thinking about the method of voting by post, from your experience, or from what you have heard, how would you rate voting by post?

	All	Voted in by- election	Did not vote in by- election
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	(500)	(425)	(66)
	%	%	%
Consider it very/fairly easy	95	95	94
Consider it very/fairly convenient	95	95	95
Consider it very/fairly reliable	80	81	71
Consider it very/fairly safe from fraud or abuse	50	51	45

Source: MORI

Table 10: Thinking about the method of voting by post, from your experience, or from what you have heard, how would you rate voting by post?

	All	Support postal ballots in future	Oppose postal ballots in future
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	(500)	(256)	(155)
	%	%	%
Consider it very/fairly easy	95	99	90
Consider it very/fairly convenient	95	99	86
Consider it very/fairly reliable	80	97	50
Consider it very/fairly safe from fraud or abuse	50	68	21

Source: MORI

Although the small sub-sample size means that the analysis is at best indicative, it does at least appear that young electors may be less wary of the reliability of postal ballots, and their susceptibility to fraud and abuse.

The overall proportion that said they felt the postal ballot process was safe from fraud and abuse was broadly in line with that found by ICM in a survey of adults in the 2004 English pilot regions, where 51% said they felt it was safe³, although in the ICM survey, just 34% said they felt it was unsafe from fraud and abuse.

³ ICM poll for the Electoral Commission, see 'Delivering Democracy? The future of postal voting', The Electoral Commission, 2004.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Council offered a number of different facilities to people who may not have been familiar with postal voting - an official home visit to help complete the ballot paper, a telephone helpline to answer queries, and assistance and delivery points in Colinton where the completed ballot paper could be returned in person. Awareness of these services was patchy, however.

A majority of electors in Colinton were aware that the Council offered assistance and delivery points (80%) and a telephone helpline (68%), but fewer than half (46%) were aware that an official home visit was available. Awareness of the assistance and delivery points in Colinton was substantially higher than was found among electors in the 2004 all postal pilots in England where 50% of the electorate said they were aware of assistance and delivery points on offer in their area.⁴

Table 11: The Council offered help to people who may not be familiar with postal voting. For each of the following, can you tell me, were you aware that it was available?

	An official home visit	A telephone helpline	Assistance and delivery points in Colinton
<i>Base: All who are aware of by-election (491)</i>	%	%	%
Yes, aware	46	68	80
No, not aware	53	31	19
Don't know	1	1	1

Source: MORI

Those who did not vote in the by-election were the most likely group to have been unaware of the services offered. A majority of all non-voters were not aware of the different services, with more than eight in ten (86%) not aware of official home visits, compared to fewer than half (48%) of voters.

Only the assistance and delivery points were actually used by respondents to the survey. One in ten (10%) used them to return their ballot paper in person and the vast majority of these people found the points helpful (88%). One in ten (13%) found the service unhelpful. The ballot box at Colinton library was the most commonly used of the assistance and delivery points with 8% of voters returning their ballot papers there. The overwhelming majority of voters returned their completed ballot paper by post (89%).

⁴ 'Delivering Democracy? The Future of Postal Voting', The Electoral Commission, 2004.

Table 12: How did you return your ballot paper?

<i>Base: All who voted (425)</i>	%
By post	89
In a ballot box at Safeways Supermarket, Hunters Tryst	3
In a ballot box at Colinton library	8
In a ballot box at Reception, City Chambers	1
Don't know	*
<i>By hand</i>	<i>11</i>

Source: MORI

Reflecting attitudes towards safety and reliability, those voters who oppose the use of postal only ballots in future elections were significantly more likely than those who support their use to have delivered their completed ballot papers by hand. One in five (19%) who oppose future postal ballots hand delivered their paper compared with only 5% of those who support future postal ballots. A majority of those who oppose the use of future postal-only ballots, however, still returned their ballot papers by post (80%), although significantly less than those who support future use (95%).

The majority of those who voted by post and were unaware of the option to hand deliver said they were happy with the way in which they voted. One in ten (9%) would have preferred to have delivered their ballot paper by hand if they knew the option existed. Three-quarters (77%) were happy to post. Given that nine in ten residents (89%) posted their ballot paper, rather than hand delivered it, it is interesting to note that half of all residents have concerns about the safety of postal voting. As mentioned before, 50% of Colinton residents expressed concerns that voting by post is open to fraud and abuse.

This is particularly relevant, because previous MORI research has found that safety from fraud and abuse is one of the most salient aspects for the electorate in terms of the voting process. MORI research for the Electoral Commission in 2003 found that privacy (seen as most important by 33%) and the vote being safe from fraud and abuse (30%) are most commonly seen as important factors for voters. Convenience is important to one in five (20%) and ease of use to one in six (15%)⁵.

⁵ 'Public Opinion and the 2003 Electoral Pilot Schemes' MORI for the Electoral Commission, 2004

Table 13: Do you say that it is open to fraud and abuse because of some personal experience you had, because of the experience of someone you know, or because of concerns that you read or heard about in the media?

<i>Base: All who think voting by post is open to fraud and abuse (248)</i>	%
Concerns read or heard in the media	50
Just my opinion/the way I feel/think it is	20
Lacks security/anyone could get their hands on it	15
Post office/Royal Mail unreliable/untrustworthy	9
Personal experience	4
Experience of someone else	3
Other	4

Source: MORI

While concerns about the possibility of fraud or abuse in postal voting are common, they are not caused by personal experience. Half of those who think that voting by post is open to fraud and abuse (50%) hold this view because of concerns read or heard in the media. One in five just say that is the way they feel, for no particular reason (20%), while just four per cent hold this view because of some personal experience. Opinions are uniform across all sub-groups with no one group favouring one reason more than another group.

These opinions are also reflected elsewhere. MORI research among the public in the 2003 electoral pilot schemes in England revealed that concerns over fraud and abuse in postal voting were key issues for the electorate. Two in five (38%) of those who felt voting by post was poor in terms of being safe from fraud and abuse said that ‘*it’s not secure/people can find out how you voted*’ and one in four (26%) that ‘*someone else can vote in your place/steal your vote*’. One in five (17%) also felt that ‘*you can’t guarantee your vote getting there*’⁶.

Although there are concerns about fraud and abuse in postal voting, many Colinton residents are supportive of the use of postal only ballots for future elections. Half of all residents (51%) support their use compared to one in three (31%) who oppose their use. This is broadly in line with the 2004 English pilot areas where 55% of those living in pilot regions supported holding future elections exclusively by post.⁷

⁶ ‘Public Opinion and the 2003 Electoral Schemes’ MORI for the Electoral Commission, 2004

⁷ ICM poll for the Electoral Commission, see ‘Delivering Democracy? The future of postal voting’, The Electoral Commission, 2004.

Table 14: To what extent would you support or oppose the use of postal only ballots for future elections?

<i>Base: All (500)</i>	%
Strongly support	27
Tend to support	24
Neither support nor oppose	17
Tend to oppose	14
Strongly oppose	17
Don't know	1
<i>Support</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Oppose</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Net support</i>	<i>20</i>

Source: MORI

Support is spread across all sectors of the population in Colinton, with residents who voted in the recent by-election among the most supportive (54%). Those who voted are significantly more likely than non-voters to support the use of postal-only ballots in future elections (54% vs 30%). Analysis by age is inconclusive, as it reveals as much about engagement with voting as it does about attitudes to the specific method of postal ballots. Thus the tendency to be ambivalent about postal ballots is as common among younger electors as it is to either support or oppose. Among other age groups, most express a clear view one way or the other, and the balance between those supporting and opposing the method is broadly consistent.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the criteria used in the evaluation of previous election pilots, and which are set out on page 4 of the report, the conclusions of this report are as follows:

- **Success in facilitating Voting or Counting of Votes.** While there was some delay in the distribution of postal votes, the processes adopted by the Council appear to have worked successfully. Electors were offered the option of either posting their returns or delivering them to one of the three ADPs. Training on the new arrangements and in particular issues relating to security and fraud, was given to those who staffed the ADPs. The Count followed normal procedures.
- **Impact on Turnout.** There is some evidence to suggest that turnout was higher than it would have been if the scheme had not applied. However, there appears to be a small core of non-voters for whom the mechanism for casting their votes makes no difference to how likely they are to vote.
- **Accessibility and Assistance Schemes.** The low number of calls (33) to the Council's helpline suggests that local residents did not encounter particular difficulties in voting. Returning Officer's staff were available at the ADPs and were prepared to visit homes to assist electors in completing their ballot papers. A voting device was also made available at the Assistance and Delivery Points to assist those with sight impairments. No electors requested this assistance. Overall, around nine in ten (86%) voters said their overall experience of casting their vote in the by-election was 'good', including 61% who said it was *very good*.
- **Security and Fraud.** While half of respondents felt that voting by post was open to fraud or abuse, no evidence was found to suggest that the pilot scheme actually resulted in an increase in personation or other malpractice. The post-election integrity check carried out by the Council was specifically designed as an additional security test and it identified no evidence of fraud or malpractice. The post-election survey showed that the concerns expressed about postal voting do not stem from personal experience but largely from concerns read or heard in the media.
- **Cost.** The all postal process was considerably more expensive than a by-election carried out using conventional arrangements. It may be, however, that there would be some economies of scale were all postal elections to become more widely used.

The findings of this evaluation largely support the main thrust of the Council's own evaluation report and the conclusions it draws directly relating to the electoral pilot scheme. The conclusions are also broadly consistent with the previous evaluations of all-postal vote pilot schemes carried out by the Electoral Commission.

APPENDIX A: MARKED-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

COLINTON BY-ELECTION: FINAL TOPLINE

- Results are based on a survey of 500 Colinton residents conducted by telephone, in home between 29th October and 2nd November 2004.
- An asterisk (*) indicates a percentage of less than 0.5% but greater than zero. Where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of don't know categories.
- All figures are percentages based on the total sample (500) unless otherwise stated.

ASK ALL - NAMED INDIVIDUAL FROM SAMPLE AGE 18+

Q1 **Were you aware that there was a council by-election in Colinton on Thursday (28 October), or not?**

	%
Yes, aware.....	98
No, not aware.....	2
Don't remember.....	-

ASK Q2 IF AWARE OF BY-ELECTION (OTHERS GO TO Q5)

Q2 **The by-election used a system of postal voting only. Were you aware of this or not?**

	%
Yes.....	97
No.....	3
Don't remember.....	-

Base: All who are aware of by-election (491)

Q3 **You should have received your voting papers in the post several days before the election date. From what you remember, when did your voting papers arrive in the post?**

	%
On Saturday 16 Oct.....	6
On Monday 18 Oct.....	12
On Tuesday 19 Oct.....	14
On Weds 20 Oct.....	11
On Thurs 21 Oct.....	9
On Friday 22 Oct.....	3
On Sat 23 Oct.....	3
After Sat 23 Oct.....	3
Don't know, can't remember.....	37
Voting papers did not arrive.....	*

Base: All who are aware of by-election (491)

Q4 What sources of information, if any, did you find helpful in explaining how to cast your vote in the by-election in Colinton?
PROBE: What others?

	%
Information with my ballot paper.....	75
At Edinburgh City Council offices.....	*
Via the Council's website.....	-
From friends and relatives.....	2
From other information sent by the Council.....	2
In articles in the Evening News.....	1
Advertisements in the Evening News.....	1
On T.V.....	-
On local radio.....	1
From the political parties/candidates.....	9
Didn't get any helpful information.....	4
Other.....	9
Don't know.....	4

Base: All who are aware of by-election (491)

ASK ALL

Q5 Some people don't manage to vote in elections. Generally speaking, how often do you vote? Would you say you never vote, often don't vote, normally do vote, or always vote in.....

General elections	%
Always do.....	83
Normally do.....	13
Often don't.....	1
Never.....	2

Scottish Parliament elections	%
Always do.....	68
Normally do.....	20
Often don't.....	4
Never.....	8

European Parliament elections	%
Always do.....	56
Normally do.....	20
Often don't.....	9

Never..... 14

Council elections

	%
Always do.....	66
Normally do.....	24
Often don't.....	7
Never.....	4

ASK ALL AWARE OF BY-ELECTION (CODE 1 AT Q1) OTHERS GO TO Q14

Q6 Did you cast your vote in the recent by-election in Colinton, or not?

	%
Yes.....	85
No.....	15
Don't remember.....	-

Base: All residents (500)

IF DID NOT VOTE (CODE 2 AT Q6) OTHERS GO TO Q8

Q7 People have given many different reasons for not voting in the by-election. How about you, why didn't you vote? Anything else?

	%
I am not registered to vote.....	-
I was away during the by-election period.....	3
I didn't receive a postal vote.....	-
I am not eligible to vote.....	-
I really intended to vote but circumstances prevented me.....	5
There was no point in voting because all the parties are the same.....	5
There was no point in voting because it was obvious who would win.....	-
There was no point in voting because the local Council can't do very much/can't change anything.....	5
I'm just not interested in politics.....	8
You just can't trust politicians to keep their promises..	8
I didn't know what the issues are.....	5
I couldn't decide who to vote for.....	2
I didn't know there was a by-election.....	3
I wanted to vote in the traditional way by going to a polling station.....	2
I didn't know how to vote.....	-
I forgot.....	27
I just don't care about the local Council.....	5
I haven't had any information from the candidates.....	3

(Other).....	48
(None of these).....	2

Base: All who did not vote (66)

ASK ALL AWARE OF BY-ELECTION (CODE 1 AT Q1) OTHERS GO TO Q14

Q8 The Council offered help people who may not be familiar with postal voting. For each of the following, can you tell me first, were you aware that it was available.....

An official home visit, to help you complete your ballot paper

	%
Yes, aware.....	46
No, not aware.....	53
Don't know.....	1

A telephone helpline to answer queries

	%
Yes, aware.....	68
No, not aware.....	31
Don't know.....	1

Assistance and delivery points in Colinton where you could return your completed ballot paper in person

	%
Yes, aware.....	80
No, not aware.....	19
Don't know.....	1

Base: All who are aware of by-election (491)

ASK ALL AWARE OF EACH ONE (CODE 1 AT EACH ITEM) OTHERS GO TO SCREEN AT Q11

**Q9 And did you use the
An official home visit, to help you complete your ballot paper**

	%
Yes, used.....	-
No, did not use.....	100
Don't know.....	-

Base: All who are aware of official home visit (226)

A telephone helpline to answer queries

	%
Yes, used.....	-
No, did not use.....	100
Don't know.....	-

Base: All who are aware of the telephone helpline (335)

Assistance and delivery points in Colinton where you could return your completed ballot paper in person

	%
Yes, used.....	10
No, did not use.....	90
Don't know.....	-

Base: All who are aware of the assistance and delivery points (395)

FOR EACH SERVICE USED

Q10 And to what extent did you find the assistance and delivery point helpful?

	%
Very helpful.....	60
Fairly helpful.....	28
Not particularly helpful.....	5
Not helpful at all.....	8
Don't know.....	-

Base: All who used an assistance and delivery point (40)

ASK ALL WHO VOTED CODE 1 AT Q6 (OTHERS GO TO Q14)

Q11 How did you return your ballot paper?

	%
By post.....	89
In a ballot box at Safeways Supermarket, Hunters Tryst.....	3
In a ballot box at Colinton Library.....	8
In a ballot box at Reception, City Chambers.....	1
Don't know.....	*

Base: All who voted (425)

ASK IF DID VOTE (CODE 1 AT Q6)

Q12 And how would you rate your overall experience of voting by post in this council by-election?

%

Very good.....	61
Fairly good.....	25
Neither good nor poor.....	7
Fairly poor.....	3
Very poor.....	4

Base: All who voted (425)

ASK THOSE WHO VOTED BY POST (CODE 1 AT Q11) AND WERE NOT AWARE OF THE OPTION TO HAND DELIVER (OPTION 3 AT Q8)

Q13 If you had been aware that you could hand deliver your ballot paper to a local delivery point, would you prefer to have done so?

	%
Yes, would have preferred to have delivered by hand.....	9
No, happy to post.....	77
No preference.....	13
Don't know.....	2

Base: All who voted by post and were not aware of the option to hand deliver (56)

ASK ALL

Q14 Thinking about the method of voting by post, from your experience, or from what you have heard, how would you rate voting by post? Would you say it is...

a) **Easy or difficult to use? PROBE: Is that very/fairly.....**

	%
Very easy.....	64
Fairly easy.....	30
Fairly difficult.....	4
Very difficult.....	1

b) **Convenient or inconvenient? PROBE: Is that very/fairly.....**

	%
Very convenient.....	69
Fairly convenient.....	26
Fairly inconvenient.....	4
Very inconvenient.....	1

c) **Reliable or unreliable? PROBE: Is that very/fairly.....**

	%
Very reliable.....	33

Fairly reliable.....	47
Fairly unreliable.....	13
Very unreliable.....	7

d) **Safe from fraud and abuse, or open to it? PROBE: Is that very/fairly.....**

	%
Very safe.....	11
Fairly safe.....	39
Fairly unsafe.....	37
Very unsafe.....	13

ASK Q15 IF 'OPEN TO' FRAUD OR ABUSE (CODES 3 &4 AT Q14 PART d)

Q15 **Do you say that it is open to fraud and abuse because of some personal experience you had, because of the experience of someone you know, or because of concerns that you read or heard about in the media?**

	%
Personal experience.....	4
Experience of someone else.....	3
Concerns read or heard in media.....	50
Just my opinion/The way I feel/Think it is.....	20
Post Office/Royal Mail unreliable/untrustworthy.....	9
Lacks security/Anyone could get their hands on it.....	15
Other.....	4

Base: All who think voting by post is open to fraud and abuse (248)

ASK ALL

Q16 **I'd like you to think back to other elections you may have voted in. What method, if any, did you use to vote in the.....?**

a) European Election in June 2003

	%
RESPONSE CATEGORIES	
Voted at a polling station.....	70
Voted by postal vote.....	5
Voted by proxy.....	*
Voted, but can't remember what method.....	4
Did not vote.....	20

b) Scottish Parliament Election and Local Government Election in May 2003

%

RESPONSE CATEGORIES

Voted at a polling station.....	79
Voted by postal vote.....	5
Voted by proxy.....	1
Voted, but can't remember what method.....	3
Did not vote.....	12

c) The General Election in June 2001

	%
RESPONSE CATEGORIES	
Voted at a polling station.....	90
Voted by postal vote.....	2
Voted by proxy.....	*
Voted, but can't remember what method.....	2
Did not vote.....	5

Q17 To what extent would you support or oppose the use of postal only ballots for future elections? PROBE: Is that strongly or tend to support/oppose?

	%
Strongly support.....	27
Tend to support.....	24
Neither support nor oppose.....	17
Tend to oppose.....	14
Strongly oppose.....	17
Don't know.....	1

Thank you. Finally I would just like to ask you a few short questions about yourself so we can be sure we have interviewed a good cross-section of residents.

Q How old are you?

	%
18-24.....	3
25-34.....	4
35-44.....	20
45-54.....	24
55-59.....	12
60-64.....	8
65+.....	28
Refused.....	1

Q Gender

	%
Male.....	45
Female.....	55

Q Work status

	%
Working 30 hours or more a week (full-time)	41
Working 8-29 hours a week (part-time).....	15
Not working – housewife.....	6
Not working – unemployed (registered).....	1
Not working – unemployed (not registered but looking for work).....	*
Not working – retired.....	35
Not working – student.....	2
Not working – other.....	1

Q How many adults (aged 18+) are there in your household, including yourself?

1	2	3	4	5+
%	%	%	%	%
14	67	13	5	1

Q And how many children or young people (under 18) there are in your household?

0	1	2	3	4	5+
%	%	%	%	%	%
66	13	17	4	1	-

Q In total, how long have you lived in Colinton?

	%
Less than one year.....	-
1-2 years.....	3
Over 2-5 years.....	11
Over 5-10 years.....	13
Over 10-20 years.....	28
Over 20 years.....	45

Q Do you own your home or do you rent it? IF RENT, Do you rent from the Council, from a Housing Association, or from a Private Landlord?

	%
Own outright/buying on mortgage.....	94
Rent from City of Edinburgh Council.....	*
Rent from other housing association/ housing co-operative.....	2
Rent from private landlord.....	1
Shared ownership.....	-
Other.....	3

APPENDIX 2: GUIDE TO STATISTICAL RELIABILITY

STATISTICAL RELIABILITY

The respondents to the questionnaire are only a sample of the total 'population'. It is not certain therefore that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the 'true' values). However, we can predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from a knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given.

The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentages results at the '95% confidence interval', based on a random sample.

Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
100 interviews	6	9	10
200 interviews	4	6	7
300 interviews	3	5	6
400 interviews	3	4	5
500 interviews	3	4	4

Source: MORI

For example, on a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 500 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary by more than four percentage points, plus or minus from a complete coverage of the entire population using the same procedures. However, while it is true to conclude that the "actual" result (95 times out of 100) lies anywhere between 46% and 54%, it is proportionately more likely to be closer to the centre of this band (i.e. at 50%).

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be "real", or it may occur by chance (because not everyone completed a questionnaire). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is "statistically significant" – we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentages giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume "95% confidence interval", the difference between two sample results must be greater than the values given in the tables below:

	Actual Sample Size	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
Overall (500) vs:				
Sub-groups of:	100	5	8	9
	200	3	5*	5
	300	2	3	4
	400	1	2	2

*For example, if 30% of the total sample (500) give a particular answer, and 34% of respondents in a sub-group of 200 give the same answer, there is **not** a statistically significant difference between the responses of the two groups.

Looking at the third column of the above table shows that there needs to be a difference of ± 5 percentage points between the two results in order for the difference to be statistically significant.

Therefore, if 36% of the latter group give the same answer, then this **is** a statistically significant difference (since there is more than a 5 point difference between the two).

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