



## Introduction

The National Carer Organisations (NCO) welcome the opportunity to provide a response to the Scottish Government's consultation on proposal to allow proxy voting by councillors.

The National Carer Organisations are Carers Trust Scotland, Carers Scotland, the Coalition of Carers in Scotland, MECOPP, Shared Care Scotland, and the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance.

Together we have a shared vision that all of Scotland's unpaid carers will feel valued, included and supported as equal partners in the provision of care. The National Carer Organisations aim to achieve this through the representation of unpaid carers and amplifying their voices at a national level.

We believe we can deliver more for unpaid carers by working together to share our knowledge and experience, and by focusing our collective efforts on achieving improvements in areas of policy and practice that are of greatest concern to unpaid carers.

## Consultation Response

**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

**2. Do you agree with the optional criteria set out at paragraph 12 which could be applied by a local authority to allow for proxy voting?**

Yes – to an extent (see below)

No

**3. Are there any further comments that you wish to make on the proposal to allow for proxy voting (free text, 300 word maximum)?**

While we have no objections to the optional criteria, for unpaid carers who are either elected councillors or considering running for local elections, this would not go far enough. We would argue that an additional provision should be made for councillors with caring responsibilities to be able to vote by proxy if their caring role precluded them from voting. The 2022 Census showed a 27.5% increase in unpaid carers in Scotland (627,700 unpaid carers), with almost a quarter providing over 50 hours of caring each week and a majority being female<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Scotland's Census (2024), 'Scotland's Census 2022 - Health, disability and unpaid care', <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-health-disability-and-unpaid-care/>

The constraints on time act as a barrier for unpaid carers to participate in elected office and proxy voting would ensure that the voices of unpaid carers would be heard in council chambers. Unpaid carers often have limited notice when it comes to supporting those they care for. In addition, with the burden of care more likely to fall on women, proxy voting would also potentially help address the gender parity issues in councils where only 35% of elected members are female<sup>2</sup>. Many unpaid carers have other protected characteristics such as BME unpaid carers who face other intersectional barriers (linguistic, financial and health)<sup>3</sup>. Research shows a lack of BME representation in local Government, with only 1 in 5 people from ethnic minorities believing they can influence their local area<sup>4</sup>. For BME unpaid carers, proxy voting would remove one additional barrier towards political participation.

## Contacts

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<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2024), 'Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018: Scottish Ministers' Report to Parliament 2023', <https://www.gov.scot/publications/gender-representation-public-boards-scotland-act-2018-scottish-ministers-report-parliament-2023/>

<sup>3</sup> MECOPP (2017), 'Informal Caring within Scotland's Black and Minority Ethnic Communities', <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62f4f5fa696d570e19a69429/t/6397558e2f0aca3c17eed4f5/1670862226396/Briefing+sheet+03.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2021), 'Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights - anti-racist policy making: review', <https://www.gov.scot/publications/crer-ant-racist-policy-making-scotland-review/pages/6/>