

SCOTLAND'S COUNCILLORS

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INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the key findings of a survey of Scotland's councillors carried out by the Scottish Local Government Information Unit (SLGIU) immediately following the council elections in May 1999. The survey, which was undertaken in collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), aimed to answer three questions:

- ◀ How representative or unrepresentative of the community are Scotland's councillors?
- ◀ What are their interests and where do their priorities as councillors lie?
- ◀ What are their views on the key issues facing local government?

A total of 691 councillors responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 56.5%. The survey achieved a slightly lower response rate from Labour councillors, reflecting a lower level of response generally from central belt authorities compared to some rural authorities. However, overall the respondents to the survey proved to be a fairly representative sample of Scotland's councillors in terms of gender, political persuasion and previous council experience.

The survey was carried out against a background of major change in Scottish local government. In January 1998 the Government had established the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament to report on

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the relations between the Parliament and local government and on how councils can best make themselves responsive and democratically accountable to the communities they serve. The Commission's final report, submitted to the Scottish Executive in June 1999, contained a total of 30 recommendations envisaging radical changes in Scottish local government.

One of the issues considered by the Commission was a concern that councillors are unrepresentative of the general population: 'We see it as an important element in enhancing the democratic credibility of councils that their membership should itself broadly reflect the make-up of the community.'

In response to the Commission's report the Scottish Executive established the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group (the Kerley Group) to advise on electoral reform for council elections and the number of members for each council. The group was also asked to consider ways in which becoming a councillor could be made more attractive to a wider cross-section of the community.

This article draws comparisons where possible with previous surveys carried out by SLGIU in 1995 and 1996. Also it places the survey findings within the context of the debate about whether Scotland's councillors are representative of the Scottish population and the proposals to radically change the political and managerial nature of local government in Scotland.

WHO ARE SCOTLAND'S COUNCILLORS AND ARE THEY REPRESENTATIVE?

The composite Scottish councillor is a 53 year old white male, who lives in his own house, owns a car, has a degree or professional qualification, is in the Church of Scotland, and, if he is not a full-time councillor, has a professional or managerial job.

Age

The average age of Scottish councillors in 1999 was 53. This was substantially higher than the average age of the population as a whole. However, since the minimum age at which someone can become a councillor is 21, the average age of councillors is more meaningfully compared with the average age of the overall population in Scotland that is aged 21 and over, which is 48.

The biggest discrepancies between the age of councillors and the adult population is that while 2% of councillors are aged under 30 years, almost

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20% of the adult population is within this age group and 51% of councillors are within the 45-59 age bracket compared to less than 25% of the adult population.

The survey found that returning councillors (those re-elected to the council on 6 May 1999) are on average 5 years older than new councillors (those elected to the unitary councils for the first time in May 1999) - 55 compared to 50. Whereas 17% of returning councillors are aged under 44 years almost 30% of new councillors are under 44 years old.

Table 1
Age of Councillors

	All Cllrs	Adult pop.	Returning Cllrs	New Cllrs
	%	%	%	%
Under 30 yrs	2	18	1	4
30 - 44	20	30	16	25
45 - 59	51	24	50	51
Over 60 yrs	28	28	33	20

Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding up/down

Comparison of councillors' ages recorded by the 1995 and 1999 surveys shows the new intake of councillors in 1999 is slightly older than the councillors first elected in the 1995 council elections (SLGIU August 1995). 40% of new councillors were under 45 years old in 1995, compared to only 29% in 1999; and 46% of new councillors in 1995 were aged 45 – 59, compared to 51% in 1999. There was a slight increase in the percentage of councillors aged over 60 from 25% in 1995 to 28% in 1999.

The survey indicates that unless there is a big turnover of councillors at the next election, with councillors over 60 years old being replaced by new councillors under 40, the average age of Scotland's councillors will continue to increase. Measures to encourage 'older' councillors to stand down will be needed to ensure that the average age of councillors is reduced. However this has to be coupled with measures that will encourage more people under 44 years old and in particular under 30 year olds to stand for, and be elected to, their local councils. The Kerley Group has suggested that young people's participation may be encouraged by lowering the age at which people are allowed to stand for election from 21 to 18.

Employment

Just over a half of councillors who responded to the survey stated they have a full-time or part-time job or are self-employed, whilst about a quarter are retired, unemployed, or are not working for some other reason. The remaining 23% of councillors classified themselves as being full-time councillors.

Detailed analysis of the responses showed some significant differences between new and returning councillors. Only just over 10% of new councillors claimed to be full-time councillors, whilst over 30% of returning councillors placed themselves in this category.

Of those councillors who have jobs beyond the council chambers, over 70% are in professional or managerial jobs, and around 20% are in a manual job. Councillors in employment are evenly divided between those who work in the private sector (45%) and those in the public sector (18% in local government and 27% in other areas of the public sector including central government and the NHS). About 10% of councillors in employment work in the voluntary sector.

Comparison between the employment characteristics of councillors and the Scottish workforce shows that the proportion of councillors who work in local government (18%) is only slightly higher than the figure for the Scottish workforce (15%) but that 17.5% of councillors are self-employed, compared to less than 9% of the Scottish workforce.

The survey showed some significant variations between councillors from the different political parties confirming the perception that the Labour Party is the party of the public sector and the Conservative Party is the party of business; and that the SNP and Liberal Democrats are somewhere in-between:

- ◀ whereas a third of Conservatives and Independents, and a quarter of Lib Dem councillors, in employment are self-employed, only 13% of SNP and 5.5% of Labour councillors fall into this category;
- ◀ almost a quarter of Labour councillors who have a job are employed in local government, compared to only 18% of SNP, 16% of Lib Dem, and 11% of Independent councillors. The survey did not find a single Conservative councillor working in local government.

However, the survey also provided evidence that the old certainties are being broken down. The survey found that 23% of returning councillors who work are employed in local government, compared to only 12.5% of new councillors; and, amongst Labour councillors (the group with the highest

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proportion working in local government), the proportion of new councillors who work in local government is 21%, compared to 31% of returning councillors.

The survey also showed that being a councillor is increasingly seen as being a full-time occupation. Comparing the findings of the 1999 survey with the 1995 survey suggests that many councillors who had jobs when elected to the new unitary councils in 1995 either took early retirement, or resigned from their jobs, in order to devote more time to their council duties. The proportion of councillors with full-time jobs has decreased from 34% in 1995 to 26% in 1999, and the proportion of councillors with any type of employment outwith being a councillor has fallen from 59% to 53%.

Home and Car Ownership

The survey found that Scotland's councillors are more 'middle class' in their main areas of household expenditure than the Scottish population as a whole. Councillors are far more likely to own their home and to own a car than the average Scottish household. Whilst 86% of councillors are homeowners, only 62% of the Scottish population live in their own home. Less than 5% of councillors rent their home from a Housing Association or a private landlord, and only one in ten councillors lives in a council house compared to about a quarter of Scottish households. Whilst almost 90% of Scottish councillors own a car, only 62% of Scottish households have access to a car (The Scottish Executive 1999).

Education

The survey shows that Scotland's councillors are relatively well educated. Only 11% of respondents reported that they have no educational qualification, whilst over a third have a university Degree, and a further 19% have a professional qualification. These figures compare with slightly lower educational attainments for the Scottish population (aged 16 - 64); 23% with no school or post school qualification; 12% with a degree; and 13% with a professional qualification (The Scottish Executive 1999).

The findings of the 1999 survey are broadly in line with the 1995 councillors' survey, although the respondents to the latest survey had a slightly higher level of educational qualification (see Table 2).

Ethnic Minorities

The survey, along with a more detailed analysis of all 1,222 Scottish councillors, shows that ethnic minorities are significantly under-represented

in Scottish council corridors. Despite attempts by the political parties to increase the number of elected representatives from ethnic minorities, there was no increase in the number of ethnic minority councillors at the 1999 council elections.

Table 2
Councillors' Highest Educational Qualifications, 1995-9

	1995	1999
	%	%
Degree/ Higher Degree	30	35
'O'/ Standard/ Higher/ 'A' level	31	26
Professional Qualification	13	19
Other Qualification (e.g. HNC)	11	9
No school or post school qualification	13	11

Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding up/down

Only about one half of one per cent of Scotland's councillors (five Muslim and two Sikh) are from ethnic minorities, compared to 1.3% of the overall Scottish population. The under-representation of ethnic minorities is compounded by the fact that four of the five Muslim councillors are from one council - Glasgow - and 28 out of 32 councils do not have any black or Asian councillors.

Trade Union Membership

Just under 50% of councillors responding to the survey stated that they are in a Trade Union compared to about 30% of the overall Scottish workforce. However, this average figure hides a very substantial disparity across the parties - whilst 82% of Labour councillors are trade union members, only 27.5% of SNP and Liberal Democrats, 17% of Independents and 11% of Conservative councillors are trade unionists – which re-affirms the significance of the link between the trade union movement and the Labour Party.

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Religion

Over 55% of councillors who responded to the survey stated they are Protestant: 31.5% in the Church of Scotland, 4% in other Protestant churches including the Episcopalian Church, and a further 21% simply stated that they are Protestant without specifying which Church or denomination they belong to. 15% of respondents stated that they are Roman Catholics. This proportion matches the Catholic Church's estimate that about 750,000 Scots - 15% of the population - are Roman Catholics.

The survey revealed significant differences in religious belief between councillors from the different political parties. Conservatives, Independents, Liberal Democrats and the SNP respondents were predominantly Protestant whilst the Labour Party had a substantially higher proportion of Catholic councillors.

Table 3
Religious Persuasion of Scotland's Councillors, by Party

	Church of Scotland/ Protestant	Roman Catholic	Other	No Religion
	%	%	%	%
All councillors	57	15	1.5	26.5
Labour	39	29.5	2	29.5
SNP	53	4.5	0	42
Lib Dem	64	6	3	26
Conservative	82	7	0	12
Independent / other	78	5.5	0	16

Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding up/down

The survey's finding that the SNP has the largest proportion of non-religious councillors (42%) is in line with a System Three poll which found only 13% of SNP voters felt religious faith played a major part in their personal lives, compared to 29% of Tory voters, 27% of Liberal Democrats and 22% of Labour voters (**The Herald** 6 December 1999).

Gender

One of the most obvious areas in which Scotland's councillors are unrepresentative of the general population is in relation to gender. Analysis of all 1,222 councillors elected on 6 May 1999 shows that only 23% of councillors are women compared with 52% of the population. Since 22% of the respondents to the SLGIU/COSLA survey were women, the sample provided an accurate reflection of the overall gender imbalance among Scotland's councillors.

Whilst some of the political parties took measures to increase the proportion of women candidates elected to the Scottish Parliament so that 37% of MSPs are women, they failed to take any meaningful steps to increase women's representation in local government. The proportion of women councillors remained unchanged between the 1995 and 1999 council elections.

The survey revealed several significant differences between male and female councillors. Female councillors tend to be younger, are less likely to be in employment, are much more likely to consider themselves to be full-time councillors, have a lower average income, are more likely to work in the public or voluntary sectors, are less likely to be members of a Trade Union, and tend to be better educated than their male colleagues.

Table 4
Comparisons Between Male and Female Councillors

	Male	Female
Average Age	53.3 years	51.5 years
Full-time councillor	19%	37%
Annual income under £10,000	24%	50%
Public sector work	44%	53%
Private sector work	48%	30%
Voluntary sector work	8%	17%
Trade Union membership	48%	39%
Degree/ Higher Degree	32%	44%
No Qualification	13%	5%

BEING A COUNCILLOR

Reasons for Standing

One of the tasks set the Renewing Local Democracy Working Group was to identify ways in which a greater number, and more representative cross-section of the population, might be attracted to stand for election to their local council. However, there is very little information about what motivated existing councillors when they first stood for election. The SLGIU/COSLA survey tried to shed some light on this issue by asking councillors who were newly elected on 6 May 1999 to state their main reason for seeking election.

Exactly 50% of new councillors identified an interest in the community as their main reason for seeking election. For a further 34%, a strong belief in public life was the main motivation for becoming a councillor. Significantly, although the majority of councillors were elected on a party ticket, less than 13% of new councillors acknowledged that their main reason for standing was to promote their party's objectives. Only 1% of councillors (all male) admitted that they wanted to become councillors to further their career/personal development.

However, as Table 5 indicates, these overall figures mask interesting differences between the motives of male and female councillors, with a greater proportion of women being motivated by an interest in community.

Table 5
Reasons for Standing for the Council, by gender

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
Interest in community	50	45	66
Strong belief in public life	34	37	26
Promote party objectives	13	15	5
Career/ personal development	1	2	0
Other	1	1	3

The survey's finding suggests that one of the keys to promoting a greater interest in people standing for election to councils will be to increase public interest in their community and to foster a belief in public life.

Councillors' Workload

Undoubtedly one of the factors, which will deter a broader spectrum of people from seeking election to councils is the time commitment that is required of most councillors. The merging of District and Regional Councils to create unitary authorities in 1996, along with the increased expectations of elected members, has contributed to a significant increase in Scottish councillors' workload over the last two decades.

A councillors' survey conducted in 1983 found that the average councillor in Scotland spent 31 hours a week on council work (Martlew 1988). By 1996, a survey into councillors' workload, conducted by SLGIU/COSLA, revealed that the average Scottish councillor's workload had increased to between 40-46 hours a week (SLGIU December 1996). The 1999 survey suggests that there has been a slight reduction in the average workload of councillors since the early days of the new unitary authorities. The average workload estimated by returning councillors, based on their recent experience, was 37 hours a week. Further research conducted by SLGIU on behalf of the Scottish Executive Central Research Unit in November 1999 confirmed this figure as it showed the average councillor spent 36 hours a week on council business (Scottish Executive Development Department 2000).

The survey shows that newly elected councillors are likely to have substantially under-estimated the time they will need to devote to council duties. Whilst returning councillors estimated they will spend an average of 37 hours a week on council duties the average new councillor expected to devote only 25.5 hours to his/her council work. The average figure of 37 hours a week also hid some significant differences between the experience of councillors with different levels of responsibility. Councillors occupying leadership positions (conveners, leaders and committee chairs) expected to spend 39.5 hours a week on council duties compared to only 33.5 hours a week estimated by backbench councillors.

The Role of Councillors and their Policy Priorities

One of the key features of the local government modernisation agenda is the emphasis on an executive style of decision-making that separates the executive role of councillors from their representative and scrutiny roles. This involves replacing the traditional committee system with an executive model.

The SLGIU survey provided a useful insight into councillors' views about their various and diverse roles. More than 80% of respondents stated that they see their main role as being a ward representative (48%) or dealing with the concerns of individual constituents (35%). Despite the increased importance

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given to managerialism and the new Best Value regime within local government, fewer than 15% of respondents placed the setting of strategic objectives, overseeing the management of the council or monitoring service provision at the top of their priorities.

Comparison with the responses to an identical question in the 1996 survey illustrates consistency in councillors' views about their main role. It would appear that the recent debate about the role of the councillors has had little impact in persuading councillors to re-think and re-prioritise their differing responsibilities. However, the latest survey did show that a slightly higher proportion of councillors in leadership positions now view overseeing the management of the council as their main role.

Table 6
Main Role of the Councillor, 1996-9: Comparison Between Leadership Councillors and Backbenchers

	1996 All clrs %	1999 All clrs %	1999 Provosts/leaders %	1999 Backbenchers %
Ward Representative	42	48	43	41
Dealing with concerns of individuals	39	35	32	46
Setting strategic policy objectives	9	9	2	1
Implementing election manifesto	4	4	4	1
Overseeing management of council	3	3	15	8
Monitoring service provision	3	1	4	3

When asked to indicate the policy areas they would prioritise, councillors indicated a wide spread of interests, although education stands out as the main priority of local politicians. Almost one quarter of councillors responding to the survey placed education as their main priority, with over

50% placing it among their top three priorities. Housing was the only other issue that ranked as the top priority for more than 10% of councillors.

Table 7
Councillors' Top Policy Priorities

	1st Priority	Among Top 3 Priorities
	%	%
Education	23	52
Housing	13	36
Planning	9	28
Economic Development	9	23
Social Work	7	30
Transport/ Roads	7	22
Finance	7	15
Leisure	4	15

While there was little notable divergence in the priorities identified by new and returning councillors, there were some interesting differences between male and female councillors. The perception that female politicians are more likely to be interested in the 'caring' services such as social work and education, than in finance and infrastructure issues, seems to be borne out by the survey, which showed that women councillors attach far greater importance to social work than their male colleagues. Male councillors are more likely to prioritise issues such as planning, economic development, transport/roads and finance.

The fact that almost 70% of new women councillors placed either education, housing or social work as their top priority issue, compared to 54% of returning women councillors, suggests that their preference for the 'caring' services is not a result of stereotyping or pigeon-holing in the council chambers but is possibly linked to their interest in the needs of their community (see above).

COUNCILLORS' VIEWS OF THE MODERNISATION AGENDA

The SLGIU/COSLA survey shows that Scotland's councillors have very mixed feelings about the modernisation agenda that was recommended by the

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Commission on Local Government and is being promoted by the Scottish Executive.

Table 8
Female and Male Councillors' Top Policy Priority

	Female	Male
	%	%
Education	32	21
Housing	14	13
Social Work	13	5
Economic Development	6	10
Transport/ Roads	5	7
Planning	4	11
Finance	3	8

It is clear from the survey results that a large majority of Scottish councillors support local government being granted more power in the form of a Power of General Competence, and financial reforms such as returning control of the Business Rates to councils. However, only a minority of councillors fully support the modernisation agenda in relation to new political management structures and the introduction of Proportional Representation to council elections.

Local Government Finance

Despite attempts by the Scottish Executive to steer them away from concerns about the state of council finances, councillors clearly feel that the most important local government issue that has to be addressed by the Scottish Parliament is reform of local government finance.

The survey asked councillors to identify the local government issues and policies that should be prioritised by the Scottish Parliament. The issue that stood out as councillors' top priority is a review of local government finance. Almost one third of councillors suggested this issue should be the Parliament's main local government priority. The issue which achieved the next highest priority, the need for Parliament and local government to work together, was the top priority of only 10% of respondents.

Table 9
Councillors' Priorities for Scottish Parliament

	Mentioned by % of councillors
	%
Review local government funding	31
Work together with local authorities	10
Electoral reform	8
Housing issues	7
Enhanced powers for local authorities	6
Review of Quangos	5
No interference in local authority business	4
Other	28

The survey asked councillors to give their views on specific options for reforming local government finance: returning business rates to council control, introducing local taxes such as road pricing and a tourist tax, and a Local Income Tax.

With the exception of Conservative councillors, there was overwhelming support from all councillors for control of Business Rates being returned to councils. Over 60% of all respondents supported the return of control of business rates to councils, whilst only 22% opposed this proposal.

There was a more mixed response to the proposal that councils should have the power to introduce local taxes such as a tourist tax, or road charges. Whilst 44% of respondents supported councils being given the power to levy local taxes, 38% were opposed, and a further 18% were neither in favour nor against.

Views about whether the Council Tax should be replaced by a Local Income Tax were also very mixed. There was no clear majority for or against; 41% of respondents supported a Local Income Tax, 44% were opposed, and 15% were don't knows. These figures conceal substantial differences between the political parties. Whilst 77% of SNP councillors and 64% of Liberal Democrats supported their parties' policy in favour of a Local Income Tax, Labour, Conservative and Independent councillors were as equally opposed to this proposal. However, a significant, and perhaps surprisingly high,

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proportion of Labour councillors - 29% - supported the idea of the new tax even though it is not Labour Party policy.

Table 10
Councillors Supporting New Financial Powers, by Party

	Business Rates	Local Taxes	Local Income Tax
	%	%	%
Labour	68	50	29
SNP	65	48	77
Lib Dem	67	54	64
Conservative	26	12	8
Independent/ Other	65	37	34
All Councillors	62	44	41

Political Decision Making Structures

The Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament recommended that councils should review their political decision-making structures and should 'give particular consideration to formalising the political leadership as an executive', although it recognised that councils should also be able to consider other options. The Scottish Executive accepted this recommendation and established a Leadership Advisory Panel to advise councils on the review of their decision-making and policy development processes. The Executive also kept the option of directly elected leaders on the agenda.

However, the SLGIU/COSLA survey found that a large majority of councillors were not convinced that the traditional committee system should be replaced by either council executives or directly elected leaders. Less than a quarter of all councillors who responded to the survey supported the introduction of an executive model of political decision making, whilst 60% were opposed. Over 60% of respondents supported the retention of committees. The survey found only 16% of Scottish councillors supported the concept of directly elected provosts, whilst over two-thirds were opposed.

Support for replacing the committee system with an executive was stronger among councillors in leadership positions (Provosts, Conveners, Leaders and

Committee Chairs) than among backbench councillors - 29% compared to 15%.

The survey found that Labour councillors were more supportive of the executive model than councillors from other parties. Opposition to directly elected leaders was evenly spread across all the political parties, although a higher proportion of Independent councillors (26%) supported this proposal.

As with most of the issues councillors were questioned about in the survey, there was more support for this modernisation proposal from new councillors than from returning councillors; whereas only 12.5% of returning councillors supported elected provosts, 21% of new councillors supported this radical innovation.

Table 11
Support for Cabinet, Committee or Directly Elected Leader, by Party

	Cabinet	Committees	Elected Leader
	%	%	%
Labour	34	47	12
SNP	21	65	17
Lib Dem	16	73	11
Conservative	28	54	19
Independent/ Other	14	78	26
All Councillors	25	62	16

P.R. for council elections?

A small majority of the survey's respondents - 52% - were opposed to the introduction of Proportional Representation for council elections. Not surprisingly, the detailed analysis shows major differences in attitude to the issue of electoral reform between councillors from the different political parties. SNP and Liberal Democrat councillors were overwhelmingly in favour of P.R., whilst large majorities of Labour, Conservative and Independent councillors were opposed.

The 1999 survey indicates that there has been a small but significant decrease in support for P.R. amongst Scottish councillors since a survey carried out by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy in 1998 (Centre for Scottish Public

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Policy 1998). The latest survey indicated broadly similar levels of support for P.R. to those shown in the 1995 SLGIU/COSLA councillors' survey.

Table 12
Views on P.R., by Party

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
	%	%	%
Labour	19	72	9
SNP	78	9	12
Lib Dem	76	16	8
Conservative	23	65	12
Independent/ Other	19	68	13
All councillors	37	52	11

Table 13
Views on P.R. for Council Elections

	1995 (1)	1998 (2)	1999	1999 (3)
	%	%	%	%
Support P.R.	42	50	37	42
Disagree with P.R.	58	50	52	58
Neither	n/a (4)	n/a (4)	11	n/a

(1) 1995 SLGIU/ SLAMC Survey

(2) Centre for Scottish Public Policy Survey

(3) 1999 SLGIU/COSLA Survey excluding don't knows

(4) Don't knows/ no replies not included

The latest survey suggests that there was a reduction in support for P.R. among Labour councillors since the earlier surveys but that a significant minority of Conservative councillors have converted to supporting electoral reform since 1995 (see Table 14).

A Power of General Competence

The Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament recommended that the legal basis of local government in Scotland should be transformed. In Britain local government powers are prescribed in legislation and councils may only do that which they are empowered to do under statute. The Commission recommended that councils should be given a power of general competence which would effectively allow them to 'do anything for the benefit of their communities which is not specifically reserved or prohibited or already provided for through other legislation' (The Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament 1999).

Almost 75% of councillors who responded to the survey supported councils gaining more control over their own affairs through being granted a Power of General Competence. Whilst almost 23% of councillors were unsure, only 3% disagreed with this proposal. This is the only issue that commanded clear majority support amongst councillors from all political parties.

Table 14
Labour and Conservative Councillors: For and Against P.R.

	1995		1998		1999*	
	For %	Against %	For %	Against %	For %	Against %
Labour	26	74	37	59	22	78
Conservative	3	97	33	64	26	74

** 1999 survey adjusted by excluding don't knows*

CONCLUSION

The 1999 SLGIU/COSLA councillors' survey has provided a baseline against which reforms aimed at making councillors more representative of the community can be measured.

It has confirmed the generally held perception that Scotland's councillors are unrepresentative of the general population. Women and ethnic minorities are significantly under-represented. The average councillor is significantly older, twice as likely to be self-employed, more likely to own his/her home and a car, and is better educated than the general Scottish population.

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The Kerley Group, which was asked to recommend ways in which a wider cross-section of the community might be attracted to seek election to local authorities, made its final report in June 2000. Included among its 36 recommendations were suggestions for a more generous level of remuneration for councillors and a series of measures aimed at providing more support for councillors and making councillors' activities less time consuming and onerous. However, the present survey revealed that the main factor that motivated most existing councillors to seek election was an interest in the community or a strong belief in public life. Therefore perhaps the most effective way of increasing and widening the pool of people who would consider becoming councillors would be to increase interest in public life, and to increase the power of councils to make a positive contribution to their communities.

In the absence of legislation setting gender and racial quotas for elected representatives, political parties will have to bear most of the responsibility for trying to increase the representativeness of future councillors. Parties will need to look seriously at their membership profiles and adopt selection procedures which encourage more women, young people, ethnic minorities and working people to come forward and be successfully selected to win council seats.

The 1999 councillors' survey also provided a snapshot of the views of Scotland's councillors on some of the contentious recommendations of the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament, such as electoral reform and the introduction of a cabinet model. It showed that Scottish councillors remain to be convinced of the merits of key elements of the local government modernisation agenda. Whilst they want to see the powers of councils extended through a Power of General Competence and more control over financial resources, there is less enthusiasm for the development of new political decision making structures to replace the traditional committee system. Councillors are divided largely along party political lines on the issue of the introduction of P.R. for council elections.

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