



House of Commons
Scottish Affairs Committee

**Experience of the
Scottish Elections:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2007–08**

**Third Special Report of Session
2007–08**

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The Scottish Affairs Committee

The Scottish Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Scotland Office (including (i) relations with the Scottish Parliament and (ii) administration and expenditure of the Office of the Advocate General for Scotland (but excluding individual cases and advice given within government by the Advocate General)).

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The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/scotaffcom. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Dr Sue Griffiths (Clerk), Jyoti Chandola (Second Clerk), Duma Langton (Committee Assistant), Karen Watling (Secretary), Becky Crew (Secretary), James Bowman (Chief Office Clerk).

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Third Special Report

The Scottish Affairs Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2007–08 on 18 May 2008.¹ On 24 June 2008 we received a memorandum from the Scotland Office, which contained a response to the Report. The memorandum is published as an appendix to this Report.

¹ Fifth Report from the Scottish Affairs Committee, Session 2007–08, *Experience of the Scottish Elections*, HC 78

Appendix

Introduction

1. The Government welcomes the Fifth Report of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee Session 2007–08 on the experience of the Scottish elections which were held in May 2007. The Committee has identified a number of issues which it believes need to be addressed; the Government is equally concerned to ensure that everyone involved in the election process in Scotland works together to eliminate the problems that occurred at those elections.

2. This Government is determined that the events of the May 2007 Scottish elections should never happen again. In seeking to ensure that the problems which led to the spoiling of a significant number of ballot papers in the election to the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and the confusion around the use of electronic counting do not happen again the Government's overriding priority has been to put the interests of the voter first.

3. The key task now is to re-build the confidence of voters in casting their vote. The steps that the Government has set out today in the Government's statement on the Gould report and in this response to the Scottish Affairs Committee report are, the Government believes, the right ones to take to ensure that the problems of the 2007 election never happen again.

4. It is the Government's view that all political parties should work together to build on the proposals in the Gould Report in order to improve the election process in Scotland. Elections belong to the people, not individual political parties, and that is why all parties must work for across the board consensus and to ensure that the Scottish voter is put first.

5. The Gould Report on the May 2007 Scottish Parliament and local government elections was published on 23 October and the Secretary of State for Scotland immediately accepted a number of recommendations which would, in future, help to improve the experience of voters when they vote at elections to the Scottish Parliament. On 23 October the Secretary of State made the following commitment in the House:

In addition, I wish there to be further parliamentary debate in this House and will initiate wider discussion with ministerial colleagues and with the wide range of interests involved in electoral matters. That would include the Electoral Commission and Mr. Gould and his team, if possible. I believe that those are important steps to take before we finalise views to be set out in our final written response to the report.

I commend Mr Gould's report to this House and look forward to more extended debate on its findings in due course.²

6. On 13 November, when giving evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee, David Cairns, Minister of State at the Scotland Office, confirmed that the Scotland Office would be launching a consultation document as well as a series of meetings with political and other interested parties.

² HC Deb, 23 October 2007, col 167

