

Dumfries and Galloway Council submission to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

1. Introduction

Dumfries and Galloway Council welcomes the opportunity to provide views on The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Integration Joint Boards) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025. This response reflects the Council's position as a key partner within the Dumfries and Galloway Integration Joint Board (IJB). It considers governance, accountability, local operational implications, and the potential impact on the effectiveness of integrated health and social care services.

2. Democratic Accountability

The proposed amendment would result in elected councillors forming a minority of voting members on the Dumfries and Galloway IJB. As noted in COSLA correspondence, such a change could dilute democratic accountability for social care services by weakening the mandate provided by locally elected members.

Within Dumfries and Galloway, councillors play a central role in representing community needs and ensuring that local decision-making reflects public priorities. A reduction in councillor voting influence may affect public confidence in governance arrangements.

3. Governance and the Purpose of Integration Authorities

The Dumfries and Galloway IJB was established to reflect equal participation between the Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. This equal partnership underpins shared accountability and balanced decision-making.

Altering this balance may introduce governance complexity and impact the effectiveness of joint planning, commissioning, and delivery of services in a region with unique rurality, demographic and workforce challenges.

4. Accountability, Ethical Standards and Conduct

Councillors and NHS Board members appointed to the Dumfries and Galloway IJB operate under established Codes of Conduct and Standards Commission guidance. Extending voting rights to members who do not fall under equivalent accountability frameworks could create inconsistencies and uncertainties in local governance arrangements.

5. Financial Responsibilities and Potential Conflicts of Interest

The Dumfries and Galloway IJB faces significant financial pressures linked to demographic change, recruitment challenges, and demand for complex care. The requirement to set a balanced budget is therefore particularly challenging locally.

Extending voting rights to stakeholders who may also be commissioned providers could introduce conflicts of interest. Effective financial governance requires clear accountability and separation between commissioning and service provision.

6. Strengthening Engagement, Participation and Inclusion

The Dumfries and Galloway IJB benefits from strong contributions by lived-experience representatives, carers, service users and third-sector partners. The Council agrees with COSLA that participation can be strengthened through improved support, induction, training and engagement mechanisms, without altering voting structures.

This is consistent with existing commitments under Planning with People and the partnership approach embedded in our local integration arrangements.

7. Consultation Process

As COSLA notes, the consultation window prior to laying the instrument was limited. Given the scale of the proposed changes and the importance of local partnership working in Dumfries and Galloway, a more extensive and transparent consultation process would have been beneficial.

8. Conclusion

The Council recognises the value of strengthening engagement and participation across the Dumfries and Galloway IJB. However, changes to voting structures require careful consideration of governance, accountability, and financial stewardship.

Given the potential impact on local integrated arrangements, the Council considers that this instrument requires full parliamentary scrutiny to ensure any changes support effective, transparent and democratically accountable governance.