

From the Leader

Councillor Heather Woodbridge

Council Offices, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1NY



Ref: HW/GM/AM

28 January 2026

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
Scottish Parliament

Sent via email hscs.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Sir/Madam

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Integration Joint Boards) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025

Orkney Islands Council has significant concerns in relation to the above Scottish Statutory Instrument ("SSI") which will materially dilute democratic accountability for social care services.

Current legislation requires the voting membership of an Integration Joint Board to reflect equal participation by the Health Board and the Local Authority. The statutory minimum is three members each, including three Councillors on behalf of the Local Authority. In Orkney, the statutory minimum is observed: three members from NHS Orkney and three members from the Council.

If the SSI is passed, the local democratically Elected Members would become a minority on the Integration Joint Board from September 2026. The reduction would adversely impact on Elected Members' capacity to influence and secure outcomes that meet the interests of the communities that they serve. The reduction would also undermine the legitimate democratic mandate held by Councillors and devalue the role of local government as an equal sphere of democracy in Scotland.

The current voting membership of an Integration Joint Board ensures joint decision-making and accountability between the two constituent partners. An extension of voting rights to persons beyond Council and Health Board members would give rise to serious questions of accountability. It would also present significant implications for the existing statutory responsibilities and duties which are meantime carried out by the IJB through the Council and the Health Board.

Furthermore, the proposal in the SSI to extend voting rights to third sector providers would have the potential to present a significant conflict of interest when decisions on budgets and other key matters need to be made affecting public services which third sector providers are, or could be, commissioned by the IJB to provide.

The Council acknowledges that carers, service users, third sector and public partners make significant contributions to the work, business and decision-making within Integration Joint Boards. The Council is amenable to exploring options that would allow their voices to become more central in the decision-making process, and that these might include enhanced engagement, for example, mechanisms for wider community involvement in decision-making and promotion of active citizenship and embedding the voices of relevant persons throughout all stages of policy and strategy development. These would deliver tangible benefits but avoid the significant risks outlined above.

The Council is concerned that the aforementioned concerns and considerations have not received sufficient consideration and would ask that these are considered and addressed fully by Parliament.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Heather Woodbridge'.

Heather Woodbridge
Leader