



REPORT TO: Grampian Valuation Joint Board on 1 February 2019

SUBJECT: Register of Electors – performance and developments

BY: The Assessor & ERO

1. Reason for Report

- 1.1 To submit electoral registration performance details following the publication of the revised registers on 1 December 2018.
- 1.2 To update the Board on current developments in electoral registration.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **The Board note the content of this report.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The 2018 canvass was the fourth complete annual canvass to be conducted since the introduction of individual electoral registration and featured an earlier start date (1 July) and an early visits to 22,989 addresses where there was a history of non-responses.
- 3.2 Policy initiatives at both a UK and Scottish government level continue to impact on the service along with a significant volume postal vote signature refresh and the implementation of the new electoral registration computer system.

4.0 Canvass 2018 – Performance details

- 4.1 **Appendix 1** to this report provides statistical data following the publication of revised registers by 1 December 2018. The local government electorate as at 1 December was 432,135; this is 6,539 less than the electorate when the registers were last revised for 1 December 2017. The IER process of revising the registers comprises two distinct elements, the first element being the household canvass that simply informs on household composition. Household composition information may be used to remove electors' names from registers where it is established that they are no longer resident. A name cannot however be removed without at least two independently verified pieces of information demonstrating that an elector is no longer resident, or failing that, a review must be carried out that involves writing to the address in question and if necessary holding a hearing.

- 4.2 Household composition information cannot be used to make additions direct to the registers. Additions can only be made where the individual in question makes an application to register to vote. Such additions tend to follow the canvass process which in turn means that registers at 1 December are not as complete as they are after the subsequent monthly updates. On 18 January 2019 18,185 potential electors identified through canvass and ongoing registration activities were contacted by post and invited to apply to register to vote.
- 4.3 Since the implementation of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2015, that reduced the franchise age from 18 to 16 for local government and Scottish parliamentary elections, the question of when a young person can register as an attainer, and to what register do they become an attainer and when has become quite complex¹. For this reason there is a move away from statistics relating to 'attainers' to simply record the number of 15, 16 and 17 year olds currently registered to vote. In this respect there were 10,222 15, 16 and 17 year olds registered to vote as at 1 December 2018.
- 4.6 The overall canvass return rate was 84% during the 4 month canvass period. This compares to a return rate of 73% for the 2017 canvass. The last full canvass prior to IER and conducted over broadly the same time period was carried out in 2012 and at that time, the canvass return rate was 84%, with a further 8.3% of households being matched against finance data held by local authorities.
- 4.7 The combined number of automated responses to the 2018 canvass as at 1 December 2017 was 104,597. This represents the greatest number of households using cost effective automated response services and is a significant increase on the 93,919 automated household responses made by 1 December 2017. It also compares well with the 82,092 households who had opted to make automated responses prior to the introduction of IER.
- 4.8 The number of electors who opt-out of the open registers has continued to increase, with 245,146 (57%) of the total electorate as at 1 December 2018 opting out of the open registers that are available for sale to external organisations. All those aged under 16 are automatically opted out of the open register and as there is no longer a requirement to re-state the opt out preference on an annual basis; the default position is that the proportion of electors who opt out of the open register will to continue to increase on a year on year basis.

¹ On revision of the registers as at 1 December 2018, only those with 17 years of age can be treated as attainers to the UK Parliamentary register and 15 years of age for the local government register, but from 1 December onwards, those who are 16 years old can also be treated as attainers to the UK Parliamentary register, and 14 years old as attainers to the local government register providing that they reach the age of 17 or 15 respectively by the 30 November next.

5.0 Electoral Registration Developments

5.1 Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

Canvass reform is the main initiative from the UK Government and work in the last 12 months has included a practitioners' workshop to examine options around data matching to identify households where residency changes have occurred and resources can be effectively focussed. The reforms were originally anticipated to be in place for 2020 but may now have a later implementation date.

5.2 Electoral reform

Following the Electoral Reform consultation launched in December 2017 the Scottish Government opened a consultation on prisoner voting² on 14 December 2018. The deadline for responses is 3 March 2019 and in common with past practice the Electoral Registration Committee of the Scottish Assessors Association will make a response on technical aspects of the consultation. The wider aspects of the Scottish Government's reforms are anticipated to take shape in the form of a Holyrood bill.

5.3 Postal vote signature refresh

During the second week of January the service issued 26,407 letters to existing postal voters requesting a fresh signature. The law requires absent voters to provide a fresh signature every 5 years and the process involves a letter and up to two reminders before the postal vote is cancelled where no response is received.

5.4 Electoral registration system

Installation and testing of the new electoral registration software is currently under way and the switch between current and new systems will be made once this process has been completed.

5.5 Elections and referendums

The possibility of an unscheduled electoral event is currently high and resource allocation and planning in place reflects this current uncertainty.

² https://consult.gov.scot/elections/prisoner-voting/user_uploads/consultation-on-prisoner-voting.pdf

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The fourth IER canvass compares well to previous IER canvasses. A year-on-year comparison between 2016 and 2018 shows an improvement in return rates and the use of automated response channels. The early start date and early visits initiative have resulted in positive outcomes that will inform canvass planning for 2019.
- 6.2 Reform initiatives for the canvass and wider franchise changes are being monitored closely as is the roll out of new software during a period of significant political activity.

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Background Papers: