



REPORT TO: Grampian Valuation Joint Board on 19 June 2020

SUBJECT: Register of Electors

BY: The Assessor & ERO

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 To update members on legislative developments
- 1.2 To report on arrangements for the 2020 canvass.
- 1.3 To report on issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic

2. Recommendation

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

3. Legislation

- 3.1 The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 widens the franchise to include certain prisoners and also foreign nationals resident in Scotland.
- 3.2 The Act received Royal Assent on 1 April 2020 and the provisions relating to prisoner voting were commenced on 2 April. This means that prisoners serving a term of 12 months or less are now eligible to vote in local government and Scottish Parliament elections by post or by proxy.
- 3.3 The franchise for local government and Scottish Parliament elections was also extended to foreign nationals resident in Scotland, and it is anticipated that this aspect of the franchise will be effective from 3 August 2020.
- 3.4 The Scottish Elections Reform Bill and the Representation of the People (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 were approved by Parliament on 3 June. The Reform Bill widens the powers of direction of the convenor of the Electoral Management Board to Scottish Parliament elections and extends the parliamentary term from four to five years. The Regulations make consequent adjustment to procedural regulations to cater for the widening of the franchise.
- 3.5 The Parliament Constituencies Bill had its 1st reading in the House of Commons on 19 May. 2nd reading is expected on 2 June. The Bill would remove the requirement to implement the 2018 Review of UK Parliamentary constituencies, change the rules for review in order to retain 650 seats and require completion of the next review by July 2023.

4. Canvass 2020

- 4.1 The 2020 canvass is the first canvass that will use data comparison to focus registration resources on those households where there are indications that changes in the composition of the household have taken place. This is a welcome move from the 'traditional' canvass model where of all addresses were required to make a response and registration officers were required to follow-up with two reminders and a personal visit where a household did not respond. It will commence on 3 August and each household will be allocated to one of three canvass processes that are known as routes.
- 4.2 Where there is a good match between elector information and DWP data, the household will be allocated to Route 1 and receive a summary of the current registration information and be invited to update it if required.
- 4.3 Where the elector information and DWP data does not match the household will be allocated to Route 2 and receive a more traditional style of canvass form with reminders and a personal contact.
- 4.4 Communal residential establishments such as care homes and student accommodation that would benefit from a more direct approach from registration personnel dealing direct with the premises manager are allocated to canvass route 3.
- 4.5 An initial data test for the Grampian area that was carried out during March suggested that 180,000 households would be allocated to Route 1; 90,000 households would be allocated to Route 2 and some 300 establishments would be handled via Route 3.
- 4.6 Planning work is currently ongoing to refine the canvass and a national publicity campaign on a shared costs basis that is coordinated by the SAA Electoral Registration Committee will accompany the canvass.

5.0 Issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic

- 5.1 The registration service has continued to operate without interruption albeit subject to a reduction in capacity through home-based working. The monthly updates to registers continue to be published and invitations to register and their reminders continue to be issued.
- 5.2 Health and safety considerations dictate that personal visits to households that are required normally to follow-up non-returned ITRs are not being made at present.

- 5.3 The Electoral Management Board for Scotland is conducting a resilience study that suggests that there is likely to be a significant increase in postal voting in future elections. This raises issues regarding capacity. At present the service is working to deliver electoral registers and absent voters lists and corresponding data ahead of an election where the percentage of postal voters is generally between 20% and 25%. Nationally the percentage of electors who vote by post is between 17% and 18%. Any significant increase in the percentage of electors applying to vote by post would require an extension to the statutory timetable for elections to allow applications to be processed and data passed to Returning Officers for the printing of postal ballot packs.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The registration service is continuing to operate in a dynamic legislative environment.
- 5.2 The move to a data driven canvass is a major development in registration procedures.
- 5.3 Current election timetables require to be reviewed to cater for the potential of a significant increase in postal voters prior to any election.

Author of Report: Ian H Milton