REPORT TO: Grampian Valuation Joint Board on 7 February 2020

SUBJECT: Register of Electors

BY: The Assessor & ERO

1.   Reason for Report

1.1   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 period November 2019 to January 2020 have been atypical with two by-elections on 21 November 2019, the general election on 12 December 2019 and postponement of publication of revised registers to 1 February 2020.

3.2   Electoral reform agendas at both a UK and Scotland level are being implemented and will demand adjustments in service delivery

4.   Electoral Registration Developments
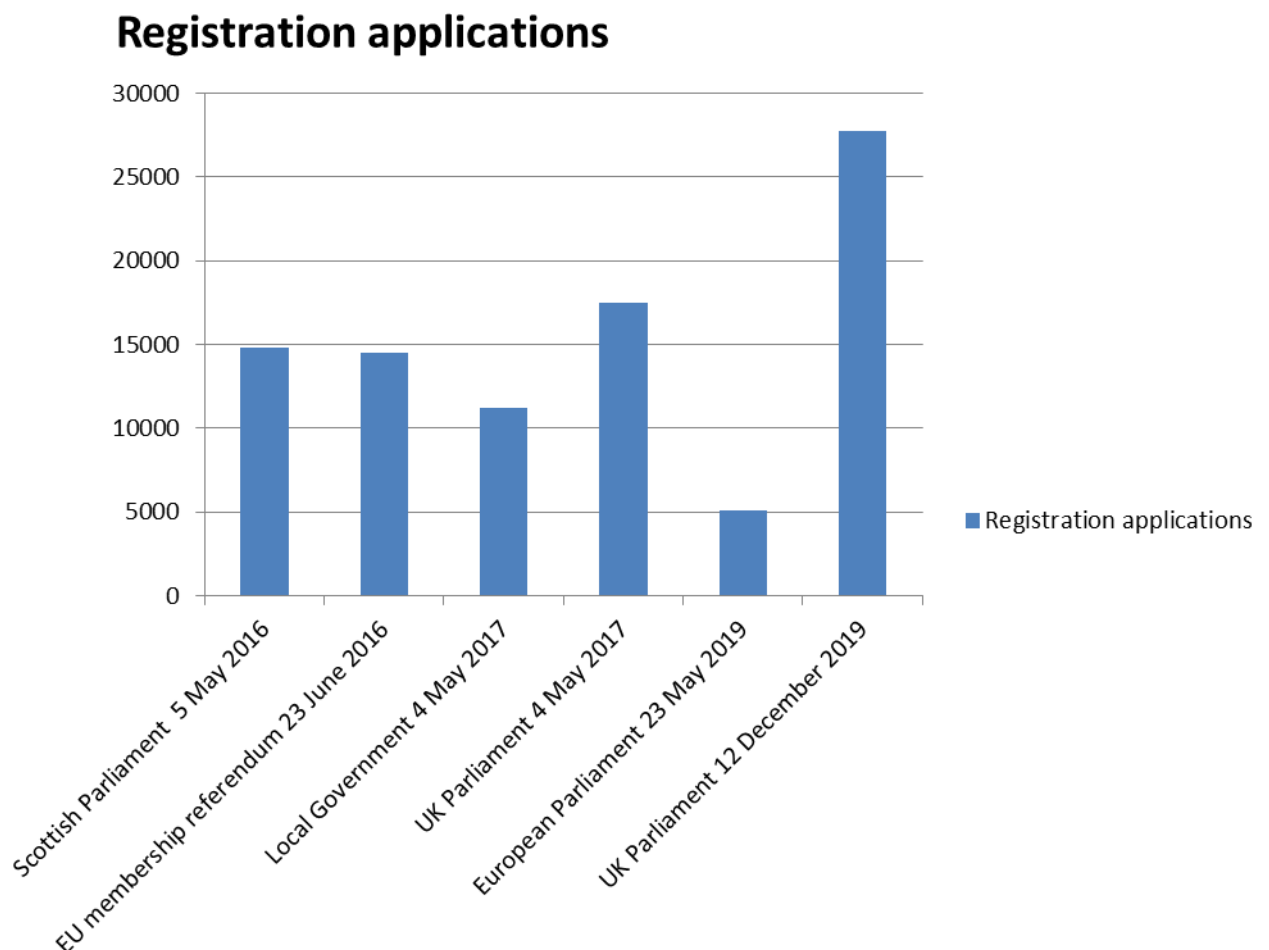
4.1   2019 Canvass

The move away from households completing and returning paper forms has continued with 107,977 households using auto-response channels to make a household return. This compares to 104,597 household returns made via auto-response channels in 2018.

The canvass was interrupted by the by-election on 3 October 2019 in Bridge of Don and by-elections in Aberdeen and Moray on 21 November, this led to the decision to postpone publication of the revised registers until 1 February 2020 which meant that the election updates to the registers for the UK Parliamentary General Election maintained consistent numbering which would not have been the case had they been revised for 1 December.

4.2   Elections

The three by-elections and subsequent General Election provided a challenge to the service that was met through dedication and commitment to deliver. Measures to mitigate the impact of a General Election included pilot updates to registers in October and November. These updates were successful and it is anticipated that this move to 11 monthly updates and an annual revision will become the norm in time.

The snap General Election generated a high level of citizen engagement with the number of registration applications made between 27 October and 26 November reaching 27,223. The relatively high volume of applications is shown in comparison to other recent national electoral events below.

Registration applications

Meeting the demands of the General Election entailed significant volumes of overtime working. Following the election and the receipt of postal vote rejection data from the Returning Officers, rejection notices to electors or their proxies where the Returning Officer rejected a postal vote have been issued.

4.3   Electoral reform

The Referendums (Scotland) Bill completed Stage 3 on 19 December 2019 and is set to come into force once it has Royal Assent. The Bill makes provision for the holding of referendums throughout Scotland.

The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill seeks to widen the

franchise for local government and Scottish Parliamentary elections completed Stage 2 on 16 January.

The Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill reforms aspects of the law relating to Scottish parliamentary and local government elections such as the length of terms. It also formalises the role of the Electoral Commission in relation to those elections and confers functions on the Electoral Management Board for Scotland in relation to Scottish parliamentary elections. This Bill is the least advanced in terms of scrutiny and is currently at Stage 1 within the Parliament.

The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 are now in place on a UK basis but similar provisions necessary for the implementation of the canvass reforms in Scotland this year have yet to be implemented by Holyrood.

5.   Conclusion

5.1   The last quarter has been particularly demanding at an operational level for the service. The commitment and dedication of the personnel in meeting indeterminate and extremely challenging workloads against hard and fast deadlines is to be commended.

5.2   The reform initiatives for the canvass and wider franchise changes continue to be monitored closely as the new legislation and its practical implications take shape.

Author of Report: Ian H Milton
Background Papers: