



REPORT TO: Grampian Valuation Joint Board on 1 November 2019

SUBJECT: Register of Electors Annual Canvass

BY: The Assessor & ERO

1. Reason for Report

1.1 Inform the Board of progress with the annual canvass.

2. Recommendation

2.1 The Board note the content of this report.

3. Annual Canvass

- 3.1 The 2019 canvass that commenced on 2 August is the fifth full canvass since the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER). This canvass, of the 282,724 dwellings in Grampian benefits from implementation of an enhanced automated response service for 2019. The 2019 canvass also benefits from the exempted sole occupancy dwellings and early visits initiatives that were introduced in 2018.
- 3.2 2019 is the second year where canvass cost saving measures have been made available to EROs. These measures mean that where a householder registers to vote and indicates that they are the sole elector resident at that address, the requirement on the ERO to carry out the following annual canvass at that address is waived for a 12 month period. This meant that household enquiry forms were not required to be issued to 2,165 dwellings.
- 3.3 In a move to increase the effectiveness of the household canvass and minimise the number of visits canvassers have to make during late autumn and early winter a sample of 17,133 dwellings that have had a history of non-responses were identified and visited by canvassers during the period August and September.
- 3.4 IER requires each new elector notified on the returned household canvass form to be supported by an individual application to register. For 2019 the enhanced automated response service included for the first time an embedded ITR that enabled new members of a household to passport straight into the registration application element of the process whilst also making the household return. As at 21 October, 7,259 citizens had applied to register to vote via this service.
- 3.5 If a new potential elector does not apply to register (either independently or via an embedded ITR), the ERO is required to issue an invitation to register by post.

Since 1 October the service has issued 23,506 invitations to register. So far, 12,244 electors have been added to registers since the start of the canvass.

3.7 The canvass return statistics as at 21 October 2019 are provided in the table:-

Year	Issued	Returned Number	%	Method of Return (%)			
				Post/Other	Phone	Online	Text
21 Oct 2019	282,724	209,678	74%	50%	5%	38%	7%
30 Nov 2018	278,639	234,218	84%	55%	5%	34%	6%
27 Nov 2017	279,280	230,631	83%	59%	6%	28%	7%
21 Nov 2016	276,440	216,598	78%	65%	6%	24%	5%
23 Nov 2015	273,181	205,264	75%	70%	2%	26%	2%

Return information immediately prior to publication of the revised register for the previous four canvasses is provided for comparison purposes.

3.8 The move towards automated response methods in preference to traditional postage of a manually completed household enquiry form has continued for the 2019 canvass and has been supported by messaging in canvass materials and media releases through corresponding local authority communications teams that have focussed for the second year running on the potential for cost savings to the public purse. This messaging has been well received by responders who have welcomed such an approach.

3.9 The volume and percentage of automated responses are provided in the table:-

Year	Number of automated responses	% of total canvass
21 Oct 2019	103,615	49%
30 Nov 2018	104,597	45%
27 Nov 2017	93,919	41%
21 Nov 2016	73,379	35%
23 Nov 2015	63,041	30%

4. National Democracy Week

4.1 National Democracy Week (14-20 October) was supported by broadcast publicity across Scotland and involved contact with universities and colleges in the Grampian area along with their student union/association representatives in order to promote registration and also raise the profile of the importance of having suitable absent voting arrangements in place if required.

5. Short-notice electoral events

5.1 Uncertainty over the possibility of short notice electoral events has been a continuing aspect of the service for 2019. Annual leave management measures have therefore remained in place throughout the year. Additional measures such as the piloting of October and November updates to registers have also been implemented and an audit of overseas electors is currently underway that involves contacting some 500 overseas electors who do not have suitable absent voting provisions in place.

6. Developments

- 6.1 There are a number of legislative developments that will impact on the service. The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill, Referendums (Scotland) Bill and Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill are all in committee stages in the Scottish Parliament and will impact significantly on the registration service. Similarly the UK government has just laid the Representation of the People (Annual Canvass) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 in draft and similar provisions will be required in Holyrood. A further dimension was added by way of the Queen's address to Parliament on 14 October that announced the UK government's new electoral integrity measures that will require the registration service to renew postal voting arrangements on a three year cycle.

7. December Register

- 7.1 At the time of writing, the intention is that the Electoral Register will be published by 1 December with copies being made available via the secure download facility to elected members, MSPs, MPs etc as prescribed. Whilst it will contain details of attainers aged 16 or over, no data for registered attainers who are under 16 will be published. If an election is called during the interim, publication of the revised register may be delayed.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 **The 2019 canvass is benefitting from an enhanced automated response service and a continued trend away from traditional postal returns. The service is also building on the 2018 successes of exempted dwellings and a fresh approach to visiting addresses which have a history of not responding to canvass forms. The piloting of additional monthly updates, participation in National Democracy Week and continued messaging to increase the use of automated response channels seek to improve efficiency and resilience.**
- 8.2 **The electoral reforms currently taking shape will impact on the service and it is anticipated that whilst some proposals will increase workloads, the reforms also have the objective of improving the effectiveness of the canvass.**

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