



REPORT TO: Grampian Valuation Joint Board on 30 June 2023

SUBJECT: Electoral Registration

BY: Principal Admin Officer

1. Reason for Report

1.1 To update the Board on current developments in electoral registration.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Board consider and note the content of this report.

3. Background

3.1 Continuing support was provided to Aberdeen City Council election team in order to deliver the Dyce/Bucksburn/Danestone by-election on 23 February 2023.

3.2 We also provided assistance to the Returning Officer for The Cairngorm National Park Authority elections on 23 March 2023 and to Aberdeenshire Council staff on a further round of Community Council elections.

3.3 Work on preparing for the 2023 annual canvass is in progress.

3.4 With regard to the Elections Act 2022, we are awaiting regulations and guidance on the second tranche of measures.

3.5 Work is continuing at the Boundary Commission for Scotland and Boundaries Scotland on constituency boundary changes.

3.6 A recent round of recruiting has brought the admin team back up to full strength.

4. Electoral Registration Update

Local Government by-election – Aberdeen City 1 Dyce/Bucksburn/Danestone

- 4.1 Following the set-up of this by-election using the new Eros Elections functionality and successful delivery of the initial poll card data to the Aberdeen City Council elections team on 17 January, tasks in relation to this by-election continued through to polling day on 23 February 2023. The use of the upgraded Eros functionality was positive, with fewer steps involved and processes running more quickly. The software provider, Idox, was on hand to quickly resolve any support queries.
- 4.2 The election took place on 23 February 2023 and our office was staffed throughout the hours of the poll from 7am to 10pm.
- 4.3 No emergency proxy applications were received either before or on the day of the poll and the day passed quietly.

Cairngorm National Park Authority elections – 23 March 2023

- 4.4 We have a role in the delivery of elections to the Board of the Cairngorms National Park Authority which take place every 4 years. One community representative is elected in each of 5 wards.
- 4.5 The Park area extends across Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire, Perth & Kinross and Angus council areas, with Ward 4 lying partly in both Moray and Aberdeenshire Council areas while Ward 5 lies mainly in Aberdeenshire with small parts also in Perth & Kinross and Angus.
- 4.6 Our role is to provide data at various stages of the election cycle to the Returning Officer and this task was coordinated by staff at Highland and Western Isles VJB.
- 4.7 The process was tested in November 2022 and data was then provided in January 2023 to enable the issue of an information pack to households within the park and again in February 2023 to facilitate the issue of the ballot packs for what was an all-postal poll.

Aberdeenshire Council Community Council elections

- 4.8 Aberdeenshire Council held nomination processes for over 40 of their community council areas in April and May. This task is dealt with by each of the 6 area offices across the council area and we provided electoral data in support of the nomination process to the appropriate area officer on request.
- 4.9 Polls are held where the number of valid nominations exceeds the number of vacant seats, and to date we have not received any requests for additional data in support of polls, which were due to take place throughout May and June.
- 4.10 The recent software upgrade included significant improvements to the extract process for both National Park and Community Council data. While this could previously be done only on a whole of Grampian basis, which was very time consuming, it can now be extracted down to individual community council or national park ward level.

- 4.11 A further boundary change has been approved by Aberdeenshire Council in relation to Banchory Community Council which affects several neighbouring community council areas and this will require updating of the affected property records in the register database.

2023 Annual Canvass

- 4.12 Planning and preparation for this year's canvass is in progress with the overall timetable for issue of canvass communications being very similar to previous years.
- 4.13 The upload of our database for the compulsory national data match will take place on 4 July with results expected within a few days. We will then carry out local data matching with the aim of reducing the number of properties which require follow up action.
- 4.14 E-communications will be issued to matched properties which meet the criteria in mid-July and where a response is received confirming that there are no changes in the household this will remove the requirement to issue a paper communication.
- 4.15 Initial letters to unmatched properties will then be issued in the first week of August, with letters to matched properties following in the second and third weeks of August.
- 4.16 Follow up action with further letters issued by post and personal contact by door-to-door canvassers, and telephone canvass where the canvass rules permit, will then take place from early September until it is concluded on or before 30 November.
- 4.17 We had considerable success in 2022 with building the size of the canvass team and recent contacts with canvassers suggest that most will return again this year. Nonetheless we are still seeking to recruit further team members and are currently following up a number of new leads, while flyers will be distributed over council intranet sites and through community council contacts. In addition, we distributed flyers at a jobs fair run by Aberdeen City Council at the Beach Ballroom on Tuesday 20 June.
- 4.18 Tablet canvassing was used for the first time during the 2022 canvass, mainly by our permanent canvassers and greatly assisted with the task, particularly in rural areas. This will be expanded during the 2023 campaign.

Legislative Changes

- 4.19 In relation to the implementation of the second tranche of measures arising from the Elections Act 2022 including changes to absent voting, online postal vote applications and overseas electors' provisions, statutory instruments are due in October, as is the launch of the online postal vote application portal. Due to divergence in the rules across different election levels, a Divergence Task Group has been established within The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The group is focussing initially on online applications and changes to absent voting which are the biggest issues, with other issues being addressed in due course.

4.20 Key milestones most relevant to Electoral Registration Officers in relation to the Act are:

Implementation date	Provision
4 May 2023	Voter identification provisions in force at relevant elections – in Scotland these are UK Parliamentary by-elections and recall petitions
5 October 2023	Voter identification provisions in force at UK Parliamentary General Elections held on or after this date
October 2023	Online absent vote statutory instruments made and take effect
	Go live for online absent vote application service
	Postal voting rule changes statutory instruments made and changes take effect
	Proxy voting rule changes statutory instruments made and changes take effect
January 2024	Overseas electors changes statutory instruments made and changes take effect

4.21 Numbers of applications for Voter Authority Certificates in Grampian remain low and this is also the case across all VJB and single authority council ERO services in Scotland.

4.22 The Electoral Commission (EC) has created an Electoral registration communications and outreach network on which we will be represented, with the first meeting taking place on 26 June.

4.23 The group will meet quarterly to share ideas for engaging with voters, including on registration and voter ID, and ensure that the resources provided by the EC to support our work are as useful as possible. At the first meeting we will be briefed on the initial analysis of voter ID at the English local elections, and the proposed approach to public awareness at UK Parliament recall petitions and by-elections.

4.24 The Scottish Government consultation on Electoral Reform closed on 18 March 2023 with 525 responses submitted. The Scottish Assessors' Association Electoral Registration Committee (SAAERC) responded to the consultation and a report of the analysis and responses will be published in the summer.

Boundary Changes

4.25 The Boundary Commission for Scotland is due to submit proposals for the changes to the UK Parliamentary Constituency boundaries to the House of Commons speaker by 1 July 2023.

4.26 A small team from Grampian VJB has been working with the Aberdeen City Council election team to provide advice and assistance on the impact of the proposed constituency boundary changes on polling districts and polling places within their area. Similar engagement may be needed with the other two employing authority election teams in due course.

4.27 Boundaries Scotland are approaching the end of the first one-month consultation in response to proposed changes to Scottish Parliamentary constituency boundaries. All responses will be considered at the end of this one-month consultation period at which point they will consider whether local or regional enquiries will be required.

Admin Team Recruitment

4.28 A successful recruitment campaign took place in March and April to fill vacant Clerical Officer posts and the Electoral Registration Assistant post within the Banff office. Clerical Officers were appointed to work within the Banff and Woodhill House locations and the admin team is now fully resourced. Training of the new staff across all areas of our services is in progress.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Although there were no area wide elections scheduled this year, a range of more limited area elections has taken place and required our support to ensure their delivery. The unscheduled by-election enabled us to try out the new Eros Elections functionality and we were one of the first customers in Scotland to use the new software for an election.

5.2 Delivering the annual canvass by carrying out all of the necessary steps as provided for in legislation as well as continuing to develop our strategies to engage with hard-to-reach groups to increase registration levels are our immediate priorities.

5.3 In tandem with our business-as-usual functions we must keep abreast of all of the pending legislative changes, making use of the guidance which will come from the Electoral Commission in order to ensure that we can implement all of the changes efficiently and effectively.

Author of Report: Linda H Smith, Principal Administrative Officer