



REPORT TO: Grampian Valuation Joint Board on

SUBJECT: Electoral Registration

BY: The Assessor & ERO

1. Reason for Report

1.1 To update the board on 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 The ERO must conduct an annual canvass, commencing no earlier than 1 July and concluding by 30 November each year and this is the main task during that period. This is the second year in which the reformed canvass rules have been in place, and more of the new provisions are gradually being incorporated into the canvass model. In contrast to 2020, door to door canvassing is taking place.

3.2 Two local government by-elections in Aberdeenshire were supported in June and August. Registers were provided for Community Council nominations in Aberdeen City and Moray areas with a small boundary change being implemented in the Moray area.

3.3 Legislative changes at both UK and Scotland level are progressing and the necessary Statutory Instruments for the conduct of the Local Government Elections 2022 have been laid in the Scottish Parliament.

3.4 Draft proposals for the UK Parliament constituency boundary changes were released on 14 October 2021 (**Appendix 1**).

4. Annual Canvass

4.1 Under the traditional canvass model, every property in the ERO area had to be contacted at least 3 times and one of these contacts had to be made by a door-to-door canvasser. All communications were paper based.

4.2 Under the new rules new communication channels such as emailing and telephoning are available in addition to paper based communications. Only households where the ERO believes there may be changes are obliged to respond to canvass communications. At least 3 attempts must be made to secure a response.

4.3 In order to identify properties with likely changes, a national data matching step is carried out with the whole register database being compared with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) records. A result is provided for each elector as either green (matched) or red (unmatched). A further match to trusted local records can also be carried out in order to achieve additional matches. The national and local data matching can be carried out in any order.

Following the completion of elector level data matching the results are converted to property level matches by the Electoral Management System (EMS) to produce matched and unmatched property data. Properties where there are no electors registered are compared with council tax records. Where council tax records show the property to be void these households can be canvassed using the matched properties route.

4.4 Matched properties follow the Route 1 process. These properties are sent the Canvass Communication A letter which summarises the current registration information at the property. The household is invited to respond if there are any changes to report. In the absence of any changes the canvass process is complete.

4.5 Unmatched properties follow the Route 2 process and are advised that they must respond to the communication sent by the ERO. In addition to the traditional canvass form a prescribed letter – Canvass Communication B is used. Both provide a summary of the current registration information at the property and advise that the household must respond.

Canvass reform requires a number of rules to be met when canvassing Route 2 properties

- the first contact must be a property contact - paper communication or a visit made by a canvasser
- one of the contacts must be a canvass form with a reply-paid envelope enclosed
- one of the contacts must be a personal contact – door to door or telephone canvass

In all there are 26 possible permutations of the 3 contacts, giving greater flexibility to conduct the canvass in varied ways at a local level.

4.6 Summary of routes and contact methods used

The following are figures for the main canvass issue in 2021. The initial forms were issued in phases throughout August. A further 2600 student properties have been canvassed on a separate timetable which commenced in late September.

| Route | First Contact | | Second Contact | | Third Contact | | Total |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Type | Number | Type | Number | Type | Number | |
| 1 | CCA (Post) | 198,245 | | | | | 198,245 |
| 2 | CCB (Post) | 88,846 | Canvass Form (Post) | 48,671 | CCB (Canvasser) | 34,883 | |
| 2 | | | Canvass Form (Canvasser) | 6,484 | Telephone | 2,647 | |
| 2 | | | Telephone | 356 | CCB (Post) | 5,170 | |
| 2 | | | | | Canvass Form (Post) | 250 | 187,307 |
| 3 | | 227 | | | | | 227 |
| Total | | 287,318 | | 55,511 | | 42,950 | 385,779 |

4.7 Personal contact now extends to phone canvassing in addition to door-to-door canvassing. A separate Telephone Canvass module was purchased in order to use this contact method. Irrespective of how many phone numbers are held for a household, the canvass rules provide that only the number for an elector who was matched during the data matching step can be used when carrying out Telephone canvassing.

Door-to-door canvassing commenced in mid September and telephone canvassing on 22 October. Both will continue until late November.

Additional training has been provided to door-to-door canvassers, in line with current Covid 19 government guidelines and canvassers have been issued with all necessary equipment to conduct the canvass safely. Normally canvassers would aim to get as many forms as possible completed on the doorstep. However, due to the prevailing circumstances the overall approach has been adapted. Canvassers are delivering a form or letter and providing appropriate advice to assist the householder to make a return. Householders are encouraged to use the automated response methods provided.

4.8 Registration activity goes hand in hand with the annual canvass. Canvass responses generate further actions to invite new registrations, commence removals and follow up on other amendments such as name changes, and changes to absent voting preferences or opt out preferences. The table below summarises the individual applications to register made during the period 1 August to 25 October in both 2020 and 2021:

| Source of application to register | Volume 2020 | Volume 2021 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Embedded online application | 12,959 | 7,508 |
| Gov.uk digital service | 7,566 | 8,747 |
| Telephone | 758 | 697 |
| Paper form via post | 205 | 2,140 |
| Email | 7 | 3 |
| Total | 21,495 | 19,220 |

Households were again given the opportunity for each new elector to complete their registration as part of the canvass process.

5. Local Government By elections

- 5.1 By-elections were held in Aberdeenshire Ward 12 East Garioch on 17 June 2021, and in Aberdeenshire Ward 8 Mid Formartine on 19 August 2021.

GVJB staff were deployed throughout the period of both polls some home working and a small contingent located in Woodhill House. Staff were prepared to deal with any spike in demand for emergency proxies. However, both events were very quiet with no issues. There were no emergency proxy requests either before or on polling day.

6. Community Council elections

- 6.1 Moray Council election team notified a small change to the boundary between the Findhorn and Kinloss and Heldon Community Council areas. IT and admin staff carried out the required work to implement the changes on the EMS.

Registration data was provided to both Aberdeen City Council and Moray Council election teams to allow checking of nominations. Polls were scheduled for 7 October in Aberdeen City using online voting with the option to request a postal vote. The Moray polls were due to take place on 28 October using all postal.

In both cases there were no contested elections following late withdrawals of candidature.

Following completion of the process in Moray, 4 previously active Community Councils were unformed due to insufficient nominations. Moray council election team have just advised that the Returning Officer has accepted petitions from 3 of these councils - Dyke Landward, Lennox and Findochty – to re-run the process.

7. Legislation

- 7.1 The following instruments which are required for the Local Government Elections 2022 have been laid in the Scottish Parliament.

- The Scottish Local Government Elections Amendment Order 2021
- The Representation of the People (Absent Voting at Local Government Elections) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021
- The Representation of the People (Postal Voting for Local Government Elections) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021
- The Representation of the People (Variation of Limit of Candidates' Local Government Election Expenses) (Scotland) Order 2021
- The Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006 (Commencement No. 6) Order 2021
- The Scottish Elections Reform Act 2020 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2021

7.2 Please see the list of proposed changes in the upcoming SSIs for the 2022 Local Government Elections which will be brought in subject to the will of Parliament:

1. Exclusion of certain items from expenditure - as in Scottish Parliament elections (and referendums under the Referendums (Scotland) Act 2020), reasonable additional costs incurred in connection with adapting campaign materials for those with disabilities, providing security at election events, and translating election materials into other languages will not count against expenditure limits. The costs of providing such services will still be funded by campaigners and parties.

2. Advertising that candidates' expenditure returns are available for inspection - to allow Returning Officers to advertise the availability of the expenditure returns in such manner as they think fit. Many stakeholders are of the view that newspaper publication is no longer the most cost-effective way of giving notice of the opportunity to inspect expense returns. Councils have alternative ways of publicising notices and documents, normally including online publicity and the placing of notices in libraries and other public buildings.

3. Increase of candidate's expenditure limits - increase a candidate's expenditure limits from £740 and 6p per elector, to £806 and 7p per elector. This will bring limits in line with those in other parts of the UK.

4. Definition of election expenses - commencement of section 17 and schedule 1 of the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006 (LEARS) and the related need to amend the definition of local government election expenses in section 90ZB and schedule 4B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as inserted by the LEARS provisions noted above).

5. Issue of official poll cards to prisoners - allow for a prisoner's official poll card to be sent to their prison address as opposed to their registered address. Part 3 of the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 extended the franchise at devolved elections to prisoners, sentenced to a term of 12 months or less, detained in UK prisons (and who would be able to vote in Scottish elections but for their incarceration).

6. Deadlines for replacement of spoilt or lost postal ballot papers - Standardising the deadline for replacement of lost or spoilt postal ballot papers at Local Government elections to 10pm on the day of poll. The current deadline is 5pm, while the equivalent deadline at Scottish Parliament elections is 10pm on the day of poll.

7. Emergency proxies - extending the availability of emergency proxies to those who suffer a disability before the application period for emergency proxies begins, but who are unable to apply until during the application period. In such a situation, the individual must provide an explanation of why they were unable to apply before the normal deadline. We are also allowing the replacement of an elector's proxy where, for whatever reason, the original proxy is unable to vote on polling day; providing that applications to vote by proxy at a particular election made on grounds of the applicant's detention must include details of the place of detention; and requiring that those applications must be received by 5pm on the day of the election.

8. Implementation of Electoral Commission post-2017 recommendations - implement proposals from the Commission's report on the 2017 Local Government elections to bring in donation controls for candidates at council elections; give a statutory role for the Commission to provide guidance for candidates and agents at council elections; and to specify a list of activities that count against candidates' spending limits at council elections.

7.3 Commencement of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020

The commencement order referenced above completes commencement arrangements for this Act. The provisions prohibit voting more than once in different local government areas on the same day (from the May 2022 elections onwards), and activate expenditure provisions and sections relating to the role of the Electoral Commission in setting out requirements for electoral expenses and donations to candidates at Local Government elections.

8. Boundary Review

8.1 The Boundary Commission for Scotland began an 8-week consultation on their Initial Proposals for the 2023 Review of UK Parliamentary Constituencies on 14 October 2021. A summary of the proposals can be found in the accompanying document and full details of the proposals can be found here;

<https://www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk/?q=reviews/2023-review-uk-parliament-constituencies>.

The website here <https://www.bcs2023review.com/> provides a mapping tool which allows detailed comparison to be made with the existing and proposed boundaries.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The canvass model continues to evolve with increased use of the reformed canvass provisions and publication of the revised registers for 1 December is on schedule.

9.2 Two by-elections were supported and, while Covid restrictions have eased, the service was prepared to react to any additional demands related to the pandemic.

9.3 Staff continue to work hard to meet each challenge as we look ahead to planning for major elections in 2022 as well as the many planned legislative changes and the proposed boundary changes.

Author of Report: Linda H Smith, Principal Admin Officer