

# DUNBARTONSHIRE AND ARGYLL & BUTE VALUATION JOINT BOARD

## Report by Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

Valuation Joint Board – 21 November 2014

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**Subject: Electoral Registration Progress**

### **1.0 Purpose**

To provide the members of the Joint Board with an update of the current position in relation to Electoral Registration.

### **2.0 Background**

The report provided to the Joint Board at the last meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2014 referred to the monthly register updates, Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and the preparation for the 2014/15 Canvass, Electoral Registration Performance Standards, the Fifth Review Of Local Government Electoral Arrangements, the European Parliamentary Elections, the Oban South and the Isles and Oban North and Lorn by-elections, the Tiree Community Council by-election, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Election and the Scottish Independence Referendum.

### **3.0 Current Position**

#### **3.1 Register Updates/Rolling Registration**

The revised Register came into force on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014. The published Register has been updated on a monthly basis to reflect changes in electors' circumstances as they occur. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 there were 13,878 additions to and 7,946 deletions from the register. The bulk of the additions to the register took place during a six week period over August and September in the lead up to the Scottish Independence Referendum, when 9,672 electors were added (68.7% of the total additions). The extra workload arising from the referendum preparations resulted in a budget overspend of approx. £30,000 (printing, stationery, postage and overtime).

Since the revised Register was published on 10<sup>th</sup> March, we have issued 21,378 individual voter registration forms as part of our duty to identify potential new electors by using other information sources. We have processed 5,163 additions and 2,112 deletions as a result of this initiative. The direct cost of this activity in outward postage was £3,739 and return postage cost £1,106.

3.2 Where the ERO believes that a person is not entitled to be registered he must carry out a 'Review' which can lead to the elector being removed from the register. As at 1st October 2014, 2,001 Reviews have been completed and 1,948 electors have been deleted.

### 3.3 The 2014/15 Individual Electoral Registration (IER) Transitional Write-out

3.3.1 IER commenced on 19 September 2014, with all new applicants having to provide their National Insurance Number and Date of Birth to support a applications made from that date.

For existing electors, a two-stage 'transition' to the new register is currently ongoing.

The first stage of the transition was to verify the identities of existing electors against records held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). All electors registered as at 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 had their names and addresses checked against DWP records so that they could be confirmed under IER. The majority of electors on the register were confirmed and were automatically transferred to the "IER Register" without having to do anything. The results of our Confirmation Live Run (CLR) are as follows:

<u>Match to DWP</u>	<u>GREEN</u>	<u>AMBER</u>	<u>RED</u>
Argyll & Bute	67.93%	11.62%	20.45%
East Dunbartonshire	77.95	5.08%	16.97%
West Dunbartonshire	72.13%	8.41%	19.46%

We then had the option of conducting local data matching (LDM). This allowed us to confirm additional electors using local sources of data such as council tax or housing benefit data. We ran a matching exercise against council tax data. This increased the positive results as follows:-

<u>Match after LDM</u>	<u>GREEN</u>	<u>AMBER</u>	<u>RED</u>
Argyll & Bute	84.36%	0.06%	15.58%
East Dunbartonshire	88.62%	0.05%	11.33%
West Dunbartonshire	88.40%	0.07%	11.53%

The second stage of the transition is a 'write-out' to all electors, which commenced on 23<sup>rd</sup> October:

- Confirmation letters (CLs) were sent to electors whose details had been matched with records held by the DWP or through local data matching;
- An Invitation To Register (ITR) was issued to each elector who had not been matched;
- Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were sent to all properties where no electors are currently registered or where potential electors may be resident.

Subsequent to the issue of HEFs, as above, ITRs then need to be sent to each individual identified on returned forms as a potential new elector.

Canvassers will be employed from Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January to make house-to-house enquiries where the forms have not been returned after the 1st

reminder stage. Canvassers will deliver the 2<sup>nd</sup> reminder and, where possible, collect completed forms.

To advise electors and increase their awareness of the changes to the voter registration system, adverts have been placed in local newspapers, local notices have been posted in public places, our web site has been updated and radio adverts have been arranged in joint working with other EROs.

- 3.3.2 Tender bids for the printing and postage of the above forms were requested in June and the contract was awarded to Document Outsourcing Limited (DOL).
- 3.3.3 We were unable to offer personalised telephone, text messaging and internet registration for “no changes” to households this year due to the nature of the write out. Citizens can however now register online. We expect to offer online facilities again next year for “no changes” and we are investigating options with companies offering change mechanisms for the HEF.
- 3.3.4 The CLs advise electors whether they have “Opted In” or “Opted Out” of the open (also known as the ‘edited’) register. At the time of issuing the CLs only 13.41% of our electorate had “Opted Out” of the open register. The majority of calls and emails to our office since the write-out commenced have been in connection with requests for Opting Out of the open register. Over 3 working days (24<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> October) we processed the following:

	<u>Phone Calls</u>	<u>E-mails</u>	<u>Opt Out Requests</u>
Argyll & Bute	741	331	865
East Dunbartonshire	990	764	1173
West Dunbartonshire	825	359	875
	<u>2556</u>	<u>1454</u>	<u>2913</u>

We have set up an interactive form on our website to allow notification of any change in opt-out status by e-mail. Alternatively, the form can be printed off and posted to us and we are also effecting changes via telephone.

- 3.3.5 Training has been provided over a number of months to all staff in preparation for the changeover to IER. With the type, intensity and scheduling of training being tailored for their role. Training was split into two main streams, a general over view of IER, the processes and legislation involved and secondly training in using the new Electoral Management System (EMS). Much of the initial training was provided by the Cabinet Office and our EMS supplier to key senior members of staff who then devised training plans and cascaded the training to relevant members of staff. As the IER process and the EMS system develop we will continue to assess and respond to the training needs of our staff.
- 3.3.6 The timetable for the transitional 2014/15 canvass means that the revised register will be published on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2015, which is much closer to the scheduled UK Parliamentary Election in May 2015 than in a usual year. The ERO will, however, ensure the timely supply of the revised register to those entitled to receive it following publication in February.

#### **4.0 Scottish Independence Referendum – 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

The workload involved in preparing registers for the Scottish Independence Referendum presented immense, and unprecedented, challenges to our staff (see 3.1 above) and the event was subject to intense scrutiny. It was due only to the skill and effort of our staff, which were beyond what anyone could have reasonably asked, that the polling station registers and postal voters' data were supplied to the local Counting Officers in line with the agreed timetable. The staff made a tremendous effort in terms of planning, and commitment to voters. Specific thanks have been made to all of the staff involved.

#### **5.0 Fifth Review Of Local Government Electoral Arrangements**

The Local Government Boundary Commission completed their public consultation on councillor numbers on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2014. They expect to consult with councils on their proposals for ward boundaries early in 2015, and will consult with the public on their proposals for ward boundaries later in 2015.

#### **6.0 Argyll and Bute Council By-Elections**

6.1 John MacGregor was elected as Oban North and Lorn councillor on 17<sup>th</sup> July but sadly passed away suddenly on 29<sup>th</sup> July.

A further by-election took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> October and Iain S MacLean (SNP) was elected.

6.2 There will be a further by-election in the South Kintyre ward on 11<sup>th</sup> December, following the resignation of Councilor John Semple (SNP).

6.3 By-Elections are also being held to fill vacancies on Community Councils in Oban and Bute. Nominations closed on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> October. Voting will be by post, with voting papers issued from Thursday Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November. Election day, and the final day for returning postal votes, is Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November.

#### **7.0 Recommendation**

Members are asked to note the content of this report.

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