

# DUNBARTONSHIRE AND ARGYLL & BUTE VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Report by Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

Valuation Joint Board – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013

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## **Subject: Electoral Registration**

### **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 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012 referred to the monthly register updates, the 2012 Canvass, Electoral Registration Performance Standards, the Sixth Review of Westminster Constituencies, the Community Council elections in Argyll and Bute and East Dunbartonshire, Individual Electoral Registration (IER), and the Campsie and Kirkintilloch North By-Election which took place on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

### **3.0 Current Position**

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

The revised Register came into force on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012. The published Register has been updated on a monthly basis to reflect changes in electors' circumstances as they occur. From January to 1st May 2013 there have been 3,193 additions and 3,759 deletions. 75% of the additions are due to the fact that we are proactive in contacting electors outwith the annual canvass.

Since the revised Register was published on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012, we have issued 25,423 individual voter registration forms as part of our duty to identify potential new electors by using other information sources. We have processed 2,386 additions and 1,105 deletions as a result of this initiative. The direct cost of this activity in outward postage was £3,654 and return postage cost £454.

3.2 Where the ERO believes that a person is not entitled to be registered he must carry out a 'Review' by writing to the elector advising the reason for his opinion and also advise them that they have 14 calendar days from the date of the notice to request a hearing, otherwise their name will be removed from the register. As at 1st May 2013 we have carried out 1,241 Reviews and have deleted 1,189 electors.

#### **3.3 The Preparation For The 2013 Canvass**

3.3.1 The Electoral Registration (Postponement of 2013 Annual Canvass) Order 2013 changes the date of the 2013 canvass and provides for the revised register to be published by 10 March 2014. Postponing the annual canvass allows us to prepare for the move to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in 2014 (see **7.0** below) ensuring that the Register is as complete and accurate as possible prior to transition.

The legislation specifies that no canvassing activity may be undertaken before 1 October 2013. The ERO can, however, still make preparations before 1st October for the canvass including recruiting canvassers, entering into contracts for services in connection with the canvass, and updating their property database.

These regulations also remove the canvass reference date and provide that, where a returned canvass form is treated as an application for registration, it is treated as having been made on the date it was received by the ERO. Consequential amendments have also been made to the wording of the prescribed canvass form to reflect these changes.

Although the timing of the 2013 canvass has changed, the processes to be followed will be the same as in any other year. The ERO is still legally required to take all steps that are necessary for the purposes of maintaining the electoral register, including:

- sending more than once to any address the form to be used for the canvass
- making on one or more occasions house-to-house enquiries
- making contact by such other means as the ERO thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in the register
- inspecting any records held by any person which the ERO is permitted to inspect
- providing training to persons under their direction or control in connection with the carrying out of the duty

The order in which these steps should be carried out for the postponed 2013 canvass has been considered, and may be subject to further review, in order to maximise response rates, bearing in mind that the changed timing of the canvass. Particular consideration is being given to how the Christmas and New Year period might impact on canvassing, for example in terms of mail delivery, staff availability, and response rates.

Queries may be received from electors who are expecting to receive their annual canvass forms earlier in the year. Front-line staff have been briefed so that they can respond to any such enquiries and explain the revised timing to electors.

- 3.3.2 The postponed 2013 canvass means that the revised register will be published much closer to the scheduled European Parliamentary election in 2014 than in a usual year. The ERO has a duty to supply the revised register to all those entitled to receive it once the register has been published, either by right or on request.

We will ensure the timely supply of the revised register following publication to those who have requested it, as well as to candidates at the election on request.

We intend to make local political parties and elected representatives aware of the changed register publication date.

- 3.3.3 We are in the process of redesigning our canvass form and restructuring our Project Plan and Timetable to take account of the changes introduced by the Electoral Registration (Postponement of 2013 Annual Canvass) Order 2013 (see **3.3.1** above).

We will, as in 2012, seek tender bids on the basis of print and postage arrangements.

A door-to-door canvass will be carried out to deal with the non-returns after the Reminder stage. We are currently in the process of employing canvassers and training will be carried out prior to them undertaking their duties.

- 3.3.4 Personalised telephone, text messaging and internet registration will be offered again this year to residents where there is “no change” to the existing household details. The canvass forms issued will list the details currently held for each address with instructions on how to use the Freephone, Text Messaging and Internet services. It is hoped that this additional convenient choice for making the return will be of particular benefit to the housebound, people living in rural areas and of course busy households wanting to save time.

To ensure that the system is secure, each registrant is provided with two unique security codes, which are randomly generated. The system maintains detailed logs of the phone calls, text messages and internet sessions of all respondents. This enables rapid identification of any attempt to abuse the system, or indeed individuals that are having problems registering.

For those who do not speak English as their first language, we are able to provide telephone registration in an additional six languages (including Scottish Gaelic).

- 3.3.5 An additional requirement of this postponed 2013 canvass will be to collect the details of all young persons who will be eligible to vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum in September 2014 (see below) and this additional duty is also being included in the canvass planning process.

#### **4.0 Electoral Registration Performance Standards**

- 4.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) gave the Electoral Commission (EC) powers to set standards of performance for EROs, Returning Officers (ROs) and Referendum Counting Officers (RCOs) in Great Britain.
- 4.2 The EC report on ERO performance in 2012 was published in May 2013.

The 2012 self-assessment against the ten performance standards developed by the EC was submitted to the EC in advance of the annual canvass and the statistical data was submitted by the deadline of Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012. The Joint Board self-assessed as performing ‘Above the Standard’ in respect of six of the ten standards and ‘At the Standard’ in the remaining four. The ERO was advised on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013 that the EC agreed with our submissions.

The EC will be developing revised performance standards for EROs to cover the transition to IER. Consultation on the revised standards started in May 2013.

For the postponed 2013 canvass, the EC will continue to monitor EROs performance against the current performance standards, and will continue to collect supporting data as in previous years. They have advised that they will confirm the detail of their plans for monitoring in June 2013.

## **5.0 Sixth Review of Westminster Constituencies**

- 5.1 The Sixth Review of UK Parliament Constituencies, which the Boundary Commission (BC) had been conducting since March 2011, will not now be completed.

The cessation of the Sixth Review has occurred since Parliament has amended the legislation governing the review. This was effected by amendments to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 which were inserted by the House of Lords on 14 and 23 January, and agreed by the House of Commons on 29 January. The Act received Royal Assent on 31 January 2013.

As a result, the BC has stopped work on the Review and will not be completing it. The revised legislation requires the BC to undertake their next review of UK Parliament constituencies using the electoral register from 1 December 2015, and to submit their report on that review during September 2018.

As a result, it is expected that the next general election to the UK Parliament, due to take place in May 2015, will be contested using the UK Parliament constituencies that have existed in Scotland since 2005.

- 5.2 The Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) for Scotland is starting its preparations for the Fifth Review of local government electoral arrangements. These reviews will start during 2013, on the basis of electoral registers from this year, and the LGBC will report in 2016 so that the resulting wards can be used for the Scottish local government elections scheduled for 2017.
- 5.3 The BC are conducting an Interim Review of the Scottish Parliament constituency boundary between Glasgow Provan constituency and Strathkelvin and Bearsden constituency, and the Scottish Parliamentary region boundary between Glasgow region and West Scotland region, at Princes Gate and Greenacres by Robroyston.

The Interim Review is required as a result of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's administrative area boundary review of the boundary between East Dunbartonshire and Glasgow City council areas which resulted in changes to the council area boundary in April 2011.

The Initial Proposals were published on 17 April 2013 for public consultation until 17 May 2013. In the Initial Proposals, they propose that the Scottish Parliament constituency and region boundaries are amended to align with the new administrative area boundary in the vicinity. The BC expects to make recommendations from this review later in 2013.

## **6.0 Community Council Elections – Argyll and Bute**

Helensburgh and Lomond was the only contest held on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012. No contest was required for Kilfinan Community Council on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and for West Lochfyne on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

## **7.0 Individual Electoral Registration (IER) – An Update**

The ERO and Principal Administrative Officer (PAO) are members of the Cabinet Office (CO) Implementation Working Group in Scotland. The PAO is also a member of the Electoral Management System (EMS) supplier's development

working group and, from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013 the PAO has been seconded to the CO on a part-time basis to lead Scotland in the implementation of IER. The PAO is the Project Manager for implementation of IER for the Board.

As part of the transition to IER, EROs will compare existing electors' names and addresses on the electoral registers with records held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in order to 'confirm' the identity of people currently on the registers.

A dry-run of this confirmation process is planned to take place over the summer of 2013, with the actual confirmation being planned for 2014. The date allocated to us for our Confirmation Dry Run (CDR) is 2nd August 2013.

At the actual confirmation exercise in 2014, existing electors whose details are matched on the DWP database will be transferred directly onto the first IER registers. Local data matching may be able to increase the numbers of electors who can be confirmed onto the IER registers.

Following confirmation that the Independence Referendum in Scotland will be held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014, the Government intends that the transition to IER in Scotland will run from on or around 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 and finish in 2015.

Those electors whose entries have not been confirmed and those who have moved house will be asked to register individually by providing their National Insurance number and date of birth.

Any elector on the pre-confirmation registers who cannot be confirmed will be retained for the 2014 register but will be asked to provide personal identifiers before December 2015 or they will be deleted from the registers.

Anyone with an absent vote will need to be confirmed or provide their personal identifiers before the revised electoral registers are published in early 2015 in order to retain their absent vote entitlement. Any new absent vote applications after the transition starts in 2014 will need to be made by someone who has been confirmed or who has registered individually.

From the start of the transition, any new elector will need to make an individual registration application and provide their personal identifiers. If an existing elector changes address, even if they have been confirmed at their previous address, they will need to register individually and provide their personal identifiers in order to be registered at their new address. EROs will need to verify the personal identifiers against the information held on the DWP database.

The CDR in August this year should give us a good indication of what we might expect in the live 2014 exercise and the results can be used to inform the development of our public engagement strategy and detailed plans for 2014, including assessment of our resource needs.

An upgrade to our EMS has been installed and our staff were involved in the User Acceptance Testing (UAT) for the IER enhancements. The PAO carried out a "connectivity test" in early May and successfully transferred 1,000 electors from each Council area to the Government Digital Service (GDS). The PAO and Admin. Manager will attend training provided by our EMS supplier in June and our

Supervisors will attend training supplied by the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) in July 2013.

## **8.0** The Draft Elections (Fresh Signatures for Absent Voters) Regulations 2013

The draft Regulations move the timing of the absent voter signature refreshes due in January 2014 and January 2015, so that they are held in August 2013. The timing of the signature refresh in January 2015 in England and Wales is to be left unchanged. This will avoid the refreshes taking place at the same time as canvass activity in the transition to IER thereby reducing the potential for confusion for electors.

Under the Fresh Signatures Regulations, EROs are required to write out in the period 1<sup>st</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> August 2013 to absent voters whose signature will be more than five years old on 31 January 2015, to request a fresh signature. In line with the existing provisions for signature refreshes, EROs will give absent voters 6 weeks to respond from the date they are written to, with a reminder sent if necessary after 3 weeks. If an absent voter fails to provide a fresh signature they will lose their absent vote. EROs are required to write to absent voters who are removed from the record to remind them that they may make a fresh application to vote by post or proxy.

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

The Referendum Bill is currently being considered by Parliament. The Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill sets out who is entitled to vote in next year's referendum, and includes provisions to enable 16 and 17 year olds to vote.

The normal household canvass form allows for the collection of young people who are already 16 or 17 years old. A separate "young person" form will be included with the 2013 annual canvass form and will be pre-populated with details of any known 15 year old resident at an address. EROs will request this information either from education authorities or directly from schools.

However, even where names are pre-populated, registration is not automatic and households still need to make a return confirming the names and eligibility of residents therein.

## **10.0 Recommendation**

Members are asked to note the content of this report.

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