



# Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Report to:** Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Meeting on:** 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024

**Subject:** Electoral Registration Update Report

**Author:** Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report is to inform board members of work undertaken within Electoral Registration, any updates to legislation and report to the Board on any electoral events.

## 2. Current Position – General

2.1 Work continues on processing all registration applications, including for postal and proxy votes and voter authority certificates, whether made on-line or paper format, in line with statutory timetable.

2.2 Since publication of the Register on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023, monthly updates have been published, resulting in 6,438 additions to and 3,651 deletions from our Registers as at the May update.

## 3. 2024 Canvass

3.1 The 2024 canvass will start on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, with publication of the revised register due to take place by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2024.

3.2 As a precursor to the start of the canvass National Data Matching of the register to the records of DWP will take place in early June, with local data matching also taking place. These matching stages help identify the appropriate form of communication to be issued to each household.

3.3 Where an email address is held then the initial contact will be by email, and if there is no response then the appropriate letter will be issued to the household. In other cases the initial contact will be by letter. Where a response is required then there will be a range of options for the elector to utilise including internet, phone and mail.

3.4 The final stage of the canvass is a visit to the household for those properties where a response was required and none received. This stage will be undertaken throughout the canvass period.

3.5 Due to the changes in Absent Voting brought about by the Elections Act 2022 the design of the canvass form will be amended this year to reflect the divergence between Absent Votes for Scottish and UK Elections, at time of writing the new style forms have not been finalised by the Electoral Commission. The change to the forms will also require amendments to the electronic systems used to record returns and our Electoral Management System.

3.6 As with all aspects of our work at the moment, our canvass plans may require to be changed if a UK Parliamentary Election is called during the canvass period or shortly thereafter.

#### **4. Future Elections**

4.1 At the time of writing no elections are scheduled, however a UK General Election will be held no later than 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025. The minimum notice requirement is 25 working days. The ERO has been in regular contact with the Returning Officers and their teams for over a year, in order to prepare for the Election, as much as we can, given the uncertainty of the actual date.

#### **5. Elections Act 2022**

5.1 The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022. The provisions of the Act come into force at various times and elements of it are subject to Regulations. The main provisions that impact the Board are the requirement for Voter ID for UK Parliamentary Elections, changes to the Absent Voting application process for the UK Parliamentary Elections and changes to the eligibility to be registered as an Overseas Elector.

5.2 Since January 2023 applications for the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) have been able to be made online or by a paper application form. A VAC will only be required if an elector wishes to vote in person and does not have another approved form of photo ID. A full list of acceptable types of photo ID was circulated to members in February 2022 and can be found at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id)

5.3 Since the end of October 2023 applications for an absent vote for UK Parliamentary Elections are now able to be made online as well as by paper and go through an identity verification process similar to that undertaken for registration. It should be noted that these changes are only applicable for electors that are applying for an absent vote for a UK Parliamentary election, the current arrangements remain in place for absent vote applications for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections. A briefing note on this change was given to members at the November 2023 meeting.

5.4 The most recent change introduced was a change to the franchise for overseas electors. Prior to 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024 in general terms, British Citizens living overseas were only eligible to register to vote on the UK Parliamentary franchise if they were previously registered within the UK within the last 15 years. The changes introduced from 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024 now extend the franchise to include British citizens living overseas who were previously registered or resident in the UK irrespective of when they left the UK. New applications can now be made online, but at the moment any existing overseas elector who is renewing their registration can only do this using a paper application form. A briefing note on this was given to members at the February 2024 meeting.

5.5 The processing of applications for Voter Authority Certificates, absent votes and the registration of new overseas electors requires the use of the ERO portal which is a digital service provided by the UK Government. There are planned improvements to this portal over the coming months with the aim to help ease the administrative burden that the portal currently places on EROs.

5.6 Our electoral team has also made contact with nursing homes, care homes and young peoples accommodation throughout the VJB area and offered to visit to update the Electoral Register, make staff aware of the recent Election Act changes and assist with registration or absent vote applications.

5.7 The UK Government has determined that a grant of £148,095 for 2024/25 has been awarded to RVJB for the implementation of the ERO requirements for voter authority certificates, the changes to absent vote applications and the extension of the overseas elector franchise. I expect that the main use of this grant will be to cover additional staffing costs which are required due to the increased amount of processing caused by the implementation of the Act. In addition to this there is a justification led bid process available for additional expenditure not covered by the grant award.

## 6. Scottish Elections Representation and Reform Bill

6.1 This Bill was introduced by the Scottish Government on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 the lead Scottish Parliament Committee for this Bill is the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and on behalf of all Scottish EROs I gave evidence to this committee on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

6.2 The Bill makes provision for a number of changes which could impact the ERO including:

- Extending the Elections Act disqualification order to bar those found guilty of offences involving intimidation of campaigners, candidates and elected representatives from being Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and councillors and create a new Scottish disqualification order which will apply to those guilty of offences involving intimidation of electoral workers;
- Taking forward a range of measures based on experience with Covid-19 to ensure emergency re-scheduling of elections can be more easily facilitated. These include:
  - Extending the period by which the Presiding Officer can postpone national Scottish Parliament elections to 8 weeks with the possibility of a further 8 week extension (and providing a power to rearrange by-elections by up to 3 months);
  - Removing the risk of an Extraordinary General Election being required in the run up to a scheduled Scottish Parliament election;
  - Allowing emergency postponement of local government elections by up to two weeks, with the Convener of the EMB able to postpone the entire national election and each Returning Officer able to postpone in their area;
  - Allowing Returning Officers to rearrange local government by-elections in their area by up to 3 months;
- Amendments to allow electoral pilot schemes to be proposed by Scottish Ministers, the EMB and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in addition to local authorities (and requiring the EMB to be consulted on pilot proposals);
- Creating a power to permit funding by the Scottish Ministers to increase democratic engagement;
- Changing the deadline by which Boundaries Scotland is required to review local government electoral wards from 2028 to 2031, to match 5 year election cycles;
- Amending the legal status of the EMB so that it will have a legal personality in its own right;
- Creating a Deputy Convener post for the EMB.

Further information can be found at [www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/scottish-elections-representation-and-reform-bill/introduced](http://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/scottish-elections-representation-and-reform-bill/introduced)

## **7. Electoral Management Board of Scotland**

- 7.1 The Electoral Management board of Scotland (EMB) was set up formally under the Local Electoral Administration (Scotland) Act 2011. This Act gives the Board “the general function of co-ordinating the administration of local government elections in Scotland.”
- 7.2 The EMB is independent of both Scottish and UK Governments as well as political parties and is accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The Convener is appointed by Ministers and leads a Board consisting of five Returning Officers, or their Deputies and three Electoral Registration Officers.
- 7.3 The EMB’s “general function of co-ordinating the administration of local government and Scottish Parliament elections” involves two specific roles:
  - (a) assisting local authorities and other persons in carrying out their functions in relation to local government elections; and
  - (b) promoting best practice in local government elections by providing information, advice or training (or otherwise).

The over-riding goal is to ensure that the interests of the voter are kept at the centre of all election planning, delivery and administration.

- 7.4 I was honoured to be invited by the Convenor of the EMB to join as one of the three Electoral Registration Officer representatives and will serve on the Board for the next four years.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 The Board notes the contents of this report

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7th May 2024

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