



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Report to: Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Meeting on: 23rd February 2024

Subject: Electoral Update Report

Author: Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1. Introduction

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

2. 2023 Canvass

- 2.1 The 2023 canvass started on Monday 3rd July 2023, and publication of the new register took place on 1st December 2023.
- 2.2 The published new local government register contained the following number of Electors:

Council Area	Electorate as at 1 st December 2023
East Renfrewshire	74,380
Inverclyde	60,333
Renfrewshire	141,309

3. Future Elections

- 3.1 At the time of writing no elections are scheduled, however a UK Parliamentary General Election will take place by early January 2025. In preparation for this, regular meetings are taking place with Returning Officer teams for each of the constituencies that we cover. The next UK Parliamentary General Election will take place with revised boundaries for constituencies which were approved by the Privy Council in November 2023. The new register published on 1st December takes account of these boundaries. In the event of a UK Parliamentary by-election taking place before the General Election then this will be run on the existing boundaries and we will be able to accommodate this.

4. Elections Act 2022

- 4.1 The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28th April 2022. The provisions of the Act come into force at various times and elements of it are subject to further 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.

- 4.2 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 or can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id
- 4.3 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.
- 4.5 The most recent change introduced was a change to the franchise for overseas electors. Prior to 16th 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 16th 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. Further details of the change to the overseas franchise can be found in the briefing note at Appendix 1.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 The UK Government has determined that a grant of £148,095 for 24/25 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

5. Absent Vote Identifier Refresh

- 5.1 As required by Regulations, electors who have a postal vote for Scottish Parliament or Local Government elections and whose signature on the personal identifiers record is more than 5 years old have been sent a notice requesting them to supply a fresh signature. Electors have six weeks to return a fresh signature or they will lose their postal vote and where necessary a reminder was issued after 3 weeks. There were just under 8,500 signature refresh notices issued and there are approximately 1,500 where we have yet to receive a response. If no response is received then they will get a notification that their postal vote has been cancelled and that they will require to vote in person, a new application form is also included with the notice.
- 5.2 Please note that the above refresh only applies to postal voters for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections, where an elector also holds a postal vote for UK Parliamentary Elections then, in line with the recent Regulations arising out of the Elections Act, no refresh is required for their UK Parliamentary absent vote which will remain in place until January 2026.

6. Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill

- 6.1 The Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill to the Scottish Parliament on 23rd January 2024. The Bill has a number of proposed changes for Scottish Parliament and Local Government Elections.

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

- 6.2 The Scottish Assessors Association have been invited to give evidence to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament who are considering the Bill.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The Board notes the contents of this report and the members briefing paper at Appendix 1.

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12th February 2024

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Changes to overseas electors registration from 16th January 2024

1. Extension of the overseas elector franchise

- From 16 January 2024, British citizens¹ can register as overseas electors if they are currently living abroad, and:
 - are currently, or were previously, registered to vote within the constituency, either as a domestic elector before they left the UK or, as an overseas elector since they left the UK. **This is known as the previously registered condition; OR**
 - were previously resident in the constituency (including those who left the UK before they were old enough to register to vote). **This is known as the previously resident condition.**
- There is no longer a time limit as to when they were last registered or resident in the UK. A British citizen can register as an overseas elector regardless of when they left the UK, provided they satisfy either the previously registered or previously resident criteria.
- Overseas electors can only vote at UK Parliamentary elections and UK-wide referendums.

2. Previously registered eligibility criteria

- An applicant **must** use the previously registered condition if at any point they have been registered to vote in the UK.
- Examples of individuals who may be eligible to register under this condition include:
 - a person who, before they left the UK, was registered to vote in a local or parliamentary register.
 - a person who has previously been registered as an overseas elector and whose declaration has expired.
 - a person last registered as basis of being a Declaration of Local Connection elector, a Merchant Seaman, an anonymous elector or as a service voter.

3. Previously resident eligibility criteria

- To be eligible under the previously resident condition an applicant must have been previously resident in the constituency but have never been registered to vote.
- Examples of individuals who may be eligible to register under the previously resident condition include:
 - a person who was too young to register when they left the UK;
 - a person who was too young to register when they left the UK, and their parent or guardian was registered at their qualifying address;
 - a person who was of no fixed abode when they left the UK and would have been eligible to make a Declaration of Local Connection (DLC) or who left the UK before 2001 (when DLC provisions were not in force).
 - a person who chose not to register while living in the UK.

¹ Includes citizens of British Crown Dependencies (Isle of Man, Jersey and Gurnsey).

4. Identity verification

- Any person who makes a new overseas elector application must provide personal identifiers (name, previous name (where relevant), NINo and DOB) which are then used to check their identity against DWP records.
- If the applicant's identity cannot be verified using DWP records, their identifiers may also be matched against local data sources.
- If we are unable to verify the applicant's identity using local data sources, we may choose to:
 - use documentary evidence provided by the applicant at the time of application to verify their identity, We can only do this where elector cannot provide their NINo or DoB .
 - request the applicant provides supporting documents verifying they are who they say they are under the exceptions process
- If we remain unable to verify the applicant's identity after using the exceptions process, we may require them to provide an attestation, or, in some rare cases, more than one attestation, or an attestation and documentary evidence.

5. Address verification

- As well as verifying the elector's identity, we are also required to verify the applicant qualifies under the condition provided in their application – either previously registered or previously resident.
- For an applicant to qualify under the **previously registered condition** they must have been previously registered to vote and are required to provide the address at which they were last registered to vote in the UK. In most instances, this will involve checking previous registers where these are held, either digitally or in hard copy.
- Where we no longer hold or have reasonable access to the register, we will take alternative steps to satisfy ourselves the applicant met the previously registered condition. These may include:
 - Using the result of the automated match against DWP records
 - Checking other local held records
 - Using any documentary evidence provided by the applicant under the exceptions process at the time of application, or requesting such evidence where it hasn't already been provided
 - Using an attestation to confirm a connection, or in some cases more than one attestation or an attestation combined with documentary evidence.
- Where an elector applies under the **previously resident condition** – we cannot check historic electoral registers. However, we must be satisfied the applicant was previously resident at the address. This can be achieved by similar means as the alternative verification mechanisms for previously registered condition outlined above.

6. Length of declaration

- If an elector successfully registers as an overseas elector, then their declaration is valid for up to three years. Each declaration will expire on the third 1st November after the date the declaration has been made unless the elector renews their declaration.
- The renewal period can begin in the last six months of their existing entitlement. Renewal declarations made within the final 6 months renews their registration for another three years.
- We will remind overseas electors of the need to make a renewal declaration by sending a notice from 1 July immediately before the third 1 November on which their registration will end and ends with that 1 November.
- Existing overseas electors (i.e., those with an arrangement in place before 16 January 2024) and those renewing their declaration prior to 16 January 2024 – have done so under the current requirements (e.g., making applications based on being previously registered in the last 15 years and renewing every 12 months).
- There is no requirement for all existing overseas electors to reapply immediately. Existing declarations will continue to expire in line with provisions in place when their last declaration was made (e.g., 12 months from date added to register with renewal sent 2-3 months before expiry). When they are next required to renew their declaration they will move to a 3-year fixed point renewal.

7. What does this mean for you?

- Make sure anyone who contacts you regarding registering as an overseas elector are aware of the new requirements and encourage them to register at the earliest opportunity.
- Make sure any registration forms you provide to overseas electors from 16 January 2024 onwards reflect the new statutory requirements.
- If you work with any organisations that support overseas electors, please make sure they are aware of these changes.
- Encourage any overseas elector to apply for a proxy vote rather than a postal vote due to the short time period available to send and receive postal votes at election time.
- Remind them they can only vote at UK Parliamentary elections and UK-wide referendums.
- For further information on the changes to overseas electors, please contact us at:

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