



# Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Report to:** Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Meeting on:** 17th November 2023

**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 postal, proxy and voter authority certificates, whether made on-line or paper format, in line with statutory timetables.
- 2.2 Since publication of the Register on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, monthly updates have been published, resulting in 18,607 additions to and 15,259 deletions from our Registers.

## **3. 2023 Canvass**

- 3.1 The 2023 canvass started on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023, with publication of the new register due to take place by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023.
- 3.2 As a precursor to the start of the canvass National Data Matching of the register to the records of DWP took place in early June, with local data matching following. These matching stages helped identify the appropriate form of communication to be issued to each household.
- 3.3 Where an email address is held then the initial contact was by email, and where there was no response then the appropriate letter was issued to the household. In other cases the initial contact was made by letter. Where a response is required then there are a range of options for the elector to utilise including internet, phone and mail.
- 3.4 If an email address wasn't held or there was no response to an email then letters were sent to the property. Where all the electors in a household were data matched then a CCA letter was issued, this letter does not require a response unless the information on it isn't correct. A total of 92,254 CCA letters were issued. In circumstances where not all the electors in a household were data matched then a CCB letter is issued, this letter requires a response to either confirm that the electors shown on it are correct or to inform us of changes. There were 41,099 CCB letters issued.
- 3.5 The final stage of the canvass is a visit to the household for those households where a response was required and none received. This stage is undertaken throughout the canvass period and involved visits to approximately 24,000 properties. At time of writing there are approximately 3,000 visits still to take place but it is anticipated that these will be completed on schedule.

- 3.6 In conjunction with many other Scottish EROs and the Electoral Commission, work was undertaken to produce a leaflet on Voter ID. This was included with our canvass mail communications and our electronic communications include a link to further information on Voter ID.

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

- 4.1 At the time of writing no elections are scheduled, however a UK Parliamentary General Election will take place by early January 2025. Members of the Team attended an Electoral Commission & Electoral Management Board of Scotland seminar on 6th October along with Returning Officers and their teams, the main theme of the seminar was preparedness for the UK Parliamentary General Election. As part of the seminar I gave a presentation on cross boundary issues from an ERO perspective. In addition to this there is also regular contact with the Returning Officer's teams.

#### **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 further Regulations. The main provisions that will 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 or 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 A funding allocation for implementing Voter Identification has been determined by the UK Government, for 2023/24 a grant of £9,509 has been received.
- 5.4 The Elections Act 2022 also brings in changes to the franchise for overseas electors. It is the first legislative step towards removing the 15-year limit on overseas electors being able to vote in UK Parliamentary elections and allowing British citizens overseas who were previously registered or previously resident in the UK to apply to register to vote. The extended franchise is not yet in operation and is expected to come into effect in the early part of 2024.
- 5.5 The most recent change introduced is the changes to the rules around absent vote applications. In mid-October the UK Government confirmed that this would go live on 31<sup>st</sup> October. Applications for an absent vote for UK Parliamentary Elections are now able to be made on line 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 will remain in place for absent vote applications for Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections.
- 5.6 The divergence of the rules around absent voting for reserved and devolved elections has resulted in significant IT changes, training requirements for our staff and updating letters and emails to ensure that the correct information is being provided to electors. Further information is available within the briefing note at Appendix 1.

- 5.7 A funding allocation for 2023/24 for this second Tranche of changes of £18,638 has been provided by the UK Government for these new burdens.

## **6. Scottish Government Consultation on Electoral Reform**

- 6.1 Following the Scottish Government consultation on Electoral Reform earlier this year. The Scottish Government programme for Government includes provision for an Electoral Reform Bill and this is expected to be published during 2024.

## **7. Boundary Commission for Scotland – Review of UK Parliament Constituencies**

- 7.1 The Boundary Commission for Scotland began its 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies in Scotland in January 2021. After going through the required consultation processes it laid its final recommendations before Parliament on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023. It is expected that the final stage of the approval process will be in November 2023 and the new boundaries will take effect at the next General Election called after they have been approved.

## **8. Electoral Commission Publications**

- 8.1 The Electoral Commission recently published a report into the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers across the UK. The report is available on their website and the headline findings conclude that *“In Great Britain, both accuracy and completeness are largely stable. The annual canvass process was reformed in 2019 by the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments with the aim of reducing the burden on Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) while maintaining levels of accuracy and completeness. There is no evidence of any significant negative impact on either measure as a result of canvass reform but there has also been no significant improvement.”*

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 The Board notes the contents of this report

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7th November 2023

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# Changes to postal and proxy voting for UK Parliamentary Elections

## 1. Identity checking requirements

- Absent vote applications (except for emergency proxy applications) made on or after 31 October 2023 for a UK Parliamentary election must contain a **National Insurance Number (NINo)** or a reason why one cannot be provided.
- The personal identifiers contained on the application (name, address, date of birth and NINo) must initially be **verified against Department of Works and Pension (DWP) data**.
- Where an application fails to match with DWP data – electors will be required to provide **documentary evidence** to verify their identity. Where this is not possible, electors must submit an **attestation** to confirm their identity.
- Absent vote applications for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections do not require a NINo or their identity to be verified for an absent vote to be granted.

## 2. Online absent vote applications

- From 31 October 2023 electors (except for anonymous electors) will be able to apply for most types of **absent vote online** for UK Parliamentary elections via [www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote](https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote) or using the QR code below



- Electors will not be able to apply online for an absent vote for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections – they can only be applied for through a paper application.
- Electors can apply for the following absent votes both online and through a paper application for UK Parliamentary elections:
  - o Postal vote
  - o Proxy vote for a particular election or referendum
  - o Proxy application for definite or indefinite period for overseas and service electors
- Electors will not be able to apply for the following absent votes online for a UK Parliamentary election but can continue to be applied for through a paper application. Paper application forms are available by contacting us on 0300 300 0150 or e-mail us at [ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk](mailto:ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk), they will also be available to download from our website shortly.

- Postal proxy application
- Postal waiver application
- Proxy application for definite or indefinite period due to disability
- Proxy application for definite or indefinite period due to employment, service etc.
- Emergency proxy application

### 3. Maximum period for absent vote applications

- From 31 October 2023, a **postal vote** for a UK Parliamentary election can be in place for:
  - a particular poll (poll held on specific date)
  - a definite period of not more than 3 years
  - a maximum period of up to 3 years
- Electors applying for a postal vote for a UK Parliamentary election from 31 October 2023 onwards will only be able to hold their postal vote until the third 31 January following the date on which their application was granted. Different rules will apply to overseas electors – for further information on how these changes impact overseas electors for UK Parliamentary elections please contact the elections team on 0300 300 0150 or email [ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk](mailto:ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk)
- For electors with a long-term postal vote (in place before 31 October 2023) there will be transitional arrangements. Existing domestic electors will be able to vote by post for UK Parliamentary elections until 31 January 2026.
- For Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections, electors can continue to have postal vote for an indefinite period but are required to refresh their signature every five years to retain it.
- **Proxy voters** can continue to put in place a proxy arrangement for an indefinite period (subject to a three yearly eligibility check and five yearly signature refresh). However, all existing proxy voters for UK Parliamentary elections who have an arrangement in place before 31 October 2023 must reapply and make a fresh application by 31 January 2024. We will be contacting existing proxy voters informing them of the need to reapply in the near future.
- Existing proxy voters for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections do not need to reapply to retain their proxy vote arrangement for these polls.

### 4. Changes to proxy voting limits

- The number of people a person can act as proxy for has also been restricted at UK Parliamentary elections.
- From 31 October 2023, a **person is not entitled to vote as proxy in any electoral area on behalf of more than four electors. Within the four electors,**

**no more than two electors can be domestic electors.** Domestic electors are those electors who are neither service voters nor overseas electors.

- For any UK Parliamentary by-elections whose notice of election is published from 31 October 2023 to 30 January 2024 – transitional provisions will be in place. Further information will be available should this scenario arise.
- For Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections the number of people a person can act as proxy for has not changed. A proxy can vote on behalf of no more than two electors, except where they are the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild of the electors. There is no limit to the number of close relatives that a proxy may vote on behalf of.

## 5. What does this mean for you?

- For future election campaigns related to UK Parliamentary elections you may wish to direct electors to the online absent vote website to apply for a postal vote rather than providing them with a paper application. This web link could also be included in any campaign literature you send out.

[www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote](https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote) or using the QR code below



- However, you should be mindful that where electors are directed to apply online, they will not be able to set up an absent vote for Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. Electors will need to complete a paper 'devolved' only application form to have an absent vote for all devolved polls. This should be made clear to electors in any communication you send.
- As absent vote forms are not prescribed, political parties can continue to create their own forms for electors if they wish. However, you must ensure any forms provided from 31 October 2023 contain all the newly required information if you wish it to be used for UK Parliamentary elections. For postal vote applications this includes:
  - o NINo or reason it cannot be provided
  - o Term of postal vote - Whether request is for a particular poll, a definite period that does not exceed 3 years or for the maximum period of up to 3 years.
- It may be desirable to use the Electoral Commission's combined paper absent vote applications rather than creating your own. The combined absent vote application enables electors to apply for UK Parliamentary, Scottish Parliamentary, and local government elections all on one form.

- Paper application forms are available by contacting us on 0300 300 0150 or e-mail us at [ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk](mailto:ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk) they will also be available to download from our website shortly.
- If you require any further information on the changes to postal and proxy voting at UK Parliamentary elections, please contact us on 0300 300 0150 or e-mail us at [ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk](mailto:ero@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk)

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