



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Report to: Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Meeting on: 25th February 2022

Subject: Electoral Update Report

Author: Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1. Introduction

This report is to inform board members of the current position in relation to Electoral Registration.

2. Canvass

- 2.1 The new canvass has been completed and we published our new register on 1st December 2021 and copies of the register were distributed to those entitled to receive it.
- 2.2 This is the second year of the reformed Canvass. As previously reported the main changes allow the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to decide on different routes for canvassing households. The route chosen for each household is based on whether the household matched when we sent a copy of our register to DWP for matching. If the household matched fully, they were allocated to a Route 1 canvass communication. If the household partly matched, we did further local data matching and if that satisfied the criteria then these properties were also added to Route 1. In effect route 1 households received a letter containing the names of people we have registered there and informing residents if all these details are correct, they need do no more. If, however, changes require to be made they are directed to the government online service for registration or they can contact our office.
- 2.3 If properties didn't match then we sent a Route 2 communication which requires a response from the household. Where there is no response this requires to be followed up including where necessary a visit to the property.
- 2.4 This leaves the last group of properties which uses the Route 3 canvass option. These are our Establishments, such as Nursing Homes, Student residencies etc. and these properties are generally dealt with by a suitable "responsible person" who fills in the information for their particular establishment. Again, the properties on this route require to be sent reminders if there is a non-return of information.
- 2.5 This year unlike 2020, when COVID restrictions meant that we could not complete this part of the canvass, we were able to undertake the door to door canvass. This was undertaken using our own staff and newly purchased tablets that carry all the information electronically. This does away with the requirement of handling paper and the information is uploaded in real time to our Electoral Management System.

3. Scottish Local Government Election - May 2022

- 3.1 Preparations are well underway for the forthcoming Local Government Election. The Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB) have issued a number of directions to Returning Officers and EROs to ensure consistency of approach across Scotland and our plans reflect these directions. Meetings have taken place with the Returning Officers teams for the three Local Authorities and agreements reached on the key dates and actions required to ensure the smooth transfer of Electoral Registration and Absent Vote information. A series of meetings are scheduled between now and Polling day with the Returning Officers to monitor progress with the election.
- 3.2 A joint event led by the Electoral Commission and the EMB was held on 27th January. This included all ERO's and RO's and key members of our teams. The seminar covered items such as the election timetable, accessibility, and cyber security.
- 3.3 This election and its preparations are being held within the context of COVID and with this in mind I along with most EROs within Scotland issued Household Notification Letters (HNLs) in late January / early February. These letters were issued to households throughout the area showing who was registered to vote within the household and whether they currently had a postal vote. The letter also gave guidance on the action to be taken if the information required to be updated and how to apply for a postal vote. To coincide with the letter going out all Scottish EROs contributed to a TV advertising campaign which was aired during the first two weeks of February. HNLs were successful in 2021 at encouraging Electors who wished a postal vote to apply well ahead of the deadline and while we haven't seen the same size of spike in applications that we had in 2021 as at 10th February we had received around 1,000 applications for a postal vote since the HNLs were issued. In addition we have also received just over 2,000 applications to be registered.
- 3.4 Some key dates that may be of interest are:

Poll Cards will be issued by the ROs around 15/16th March
Deadline to apply to Register To Vote is 18th April (midnight)
Deadline for Postal Vote Application is 19th April (5pm)

4. Renfrewshire Ward 6 By-Election

- 4.1 I reported at the last Board meeting that the Returning Officer in Renfrewshire had called a By-Election in Ward 6 Paisley South East to take place on 14th December 2021. I was informed by the Returning Officer on 25th November that after taking legal advice the By-Election was cancelled. I immediately took steps to establish what action was required, including consulting with the Electoral Commission. I confirmed that no registers had been distributed to candidates, stopped any further data supply to the Returning Officer for poll cards and postal votes and confirmed that no absent vote applications specific for that By-Election had been processed. Due to the timing of both, the By-Election and the decision to cancel, identifiable additional costs for the Board were relatively minimal at around £165.

5. Future Elections

- 5.1 At the time of writing there are no other elections scheduled, however, as always this will be kept under review and should circumstances require, our staff will be able to deliver.

6. New Legislation

- 6.1 The Elections Bill is currently going through the Parliamentary process. The current timetable would suggest that it will be no earlier than May before it receives Royal Ascent. As previously reported this Bill is likely to impose additional duties on the ERO and as the details and requirements begin to become clearer we will be working towards implementing the various requirements and will continue to keep the Board informed of progress.

Recommendations

- i. The Board notes the contents of this report.

Robert Nicol
Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
15th February 2022

For further information please contact Robert Nicol 07483921232
Or via e-mail at robert.nicol@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk