



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Report to: Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Meeting on: 18th September 2020

Subject: Electoral Update Report - Canvass 2020

Author: Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1. Introduction

This report has, of necessity, changed from that of previous years as the Canvass is now quite different to what we have known in the past. Where it has been possible, similar statistics have been used to attempt to show where the differences lie between the old and new style canvass.

2. New Legislation

- 2.1 As noted in the Electoral Update Report in May to the Board the new legislation has come into force and the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act is now law. This allows citizens of any country who are legally resident in Scotland the right to vote in devolved elections namely Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government. When the canvass started in the first weeks of August all households receiving a canvass communication included a flyer encouraging Foreign Nationals to register.
- 2.2 Alongside this extension to the franchise, prisoners sentenced to a term of 12 months or less are now also able to register to vote for both these devolved elections.
- 2.3 The Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill is still progressing through Parliament and it includes changes to allow the attainment date to be 14 years old, which means as Electoral Registration Officer's we will add young people to the register once they have reached their fourteenth birthday.

3. Canvass Reform

- 3.1 The new canvass has been legislated for and across the UK Electoral Registration officers are working with this new version. We started the canvass in Early August after the legislation was in place.
- 3.2 The main changes under this legislation allows 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 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. In the past under the old style canvass this communication required to be answered/ confirmed by the household and reminders sent if no response received. However, under the new canvass this is no longer required and one communication is now the law for Route 1 properties.

If however properties didn't match then we sent a Route2 communication which asked the householders to fill in a form for eligible electors, along the lines of the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) that we issued for the last few years. This route does however require following up if there is a non return of information.

This leaves a final number of properties which form the Route3 canvass. These are our Establishments , such as Nursing Homes, Student residencies etc and these properties are generally dealt with be a suitable "responsible person" who fills in the information for their particular establishment. Again, the properties on this route require to be sent reminders as required.

- 3.3 Please see **Appendix 1** showing the totals of forms posted in the last 5 years to see what the difference is compared to this year's new canvass. If we average the number of forms from 2016-2019, the number issued this year is approximately 72% of what we issued previously. This will hopefully translate into a cost saving in real terms both through printing and postage and staff resources e.g. issuing reminders etc.
- 3.4 The next graph in **Appendix 1** shows the number of households which we anticipate will require a personal visit (Door to Door). If we average the last four years figures from this graph, and assume the worst case scenario of us having to canvass circa 27,000 households this year, this results in us carrying out only 57% of the previous four-year average. This is a worst case scenario and we actually expect to be canvassing circa 22,000 households which is 46% of the average of the last four years. This is a very significant saving both in payments to canvassers and in staff time organising and running the temporary canvassers employed.
- 3.5 **Appendix 2** shows the numbers of forms posted and door to door canvassing in a tabular form broken down into each constituent council area, for your information.
- 3.6 A further innovation for this year's canvass was the power given to ERO's to use electronic communication to contact those electors who had noted this as a preference for receiving information from us. We managed to issue over 54,000 e-comms and although the response rate wasn't particularly high at just short of 17,000 it still translates into a significant saving for printing, postage and staff time. I hope that as we move into the next few years of this style of canvass this will prove to be an ever increasing method of choice and consequently deliver continued savings. **See Appendix 3**

As this is the first year of the new style canvass the Cabinet Office(CO) has given us some funding again this year to help with costs. As reported previously when we had made the move to Individual Electoral Registration in 2014 the CO had given a commitment to fund the extra costs of carrying out this new approach to canvassing. However, as this years' new style of canvass was being discussed and designed it was hoped that significant reductions to the cost of the annual canvass could be achieved. So, the funding from the CO this year is much reduced, although it should be enough to cover this years costs. Going forward over the next few years savings should become more significant, especially if we can move more stakeholders to using e-communications which removes both printing and postage costs .

3.7 Decisions on whether we carry out the final part of canvass with the personal visit (door knock) have still to be made. The personal visit phase of the canvass will not be taking place before late September/ early October. However, whether door to door canvassing will be allowed at that time remains uncertain. We will plan for it in any case and follow Government advice.

4. Future Elections

4.1 The next scheduled elections are for May 2021 Scottish Parliamentary. As a member of the Electoral Management Board (EMB) for Scotland and as Vice Chair of the Scottish Assessors Electoral Registration Committee I am involved with a number of stakeholders and fellow ERO's exploring ways to ensure a safe delivery of next May's elections. It is hard to predict what phase of lockdown either the country as a whole or indeed local lockdown restrictions might be. The best action is to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Realistically, all ERO's are being asked to look at their resilience, the resources they have and those they might need to deliver the register on time. All this taking into account that there may well be a surge in both postal vote applications and emergency proxies. Work is ongoing in trying to quantify the effects of these changes and planning and resources will be put in place to mitigate as much as it is possible to do so.

4.2 At the time of writing there are no other elections scheduled, however, as always this will be kept under review and should circumstances require, the Electoral Management System combined with our staff, will be able to deliver.

5. Publication of Registers

5.1 At present there is legislation being debated on moving the traditional publication date of 1st December 2020 to 1st February 2021. We will publish on whatever the directed date is once legislation is in place.

6. Ongoing Projects

6.1 I am on both the Westminster and Scottish Government Accessibility Groups, these groups are still meeting, virtually and it is beneficial to be a member of both to help understand and find solutions for electors with various needs to ensure we are as inclusive as possible when creating our registers.

General Conclusions

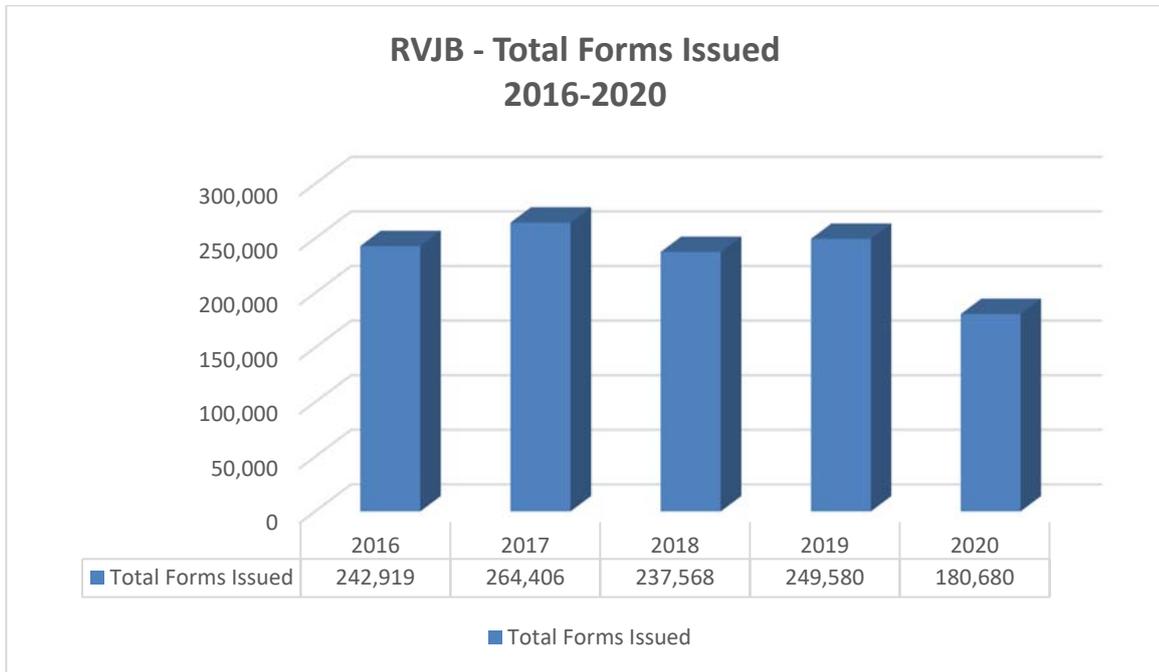
I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff for their hard work in continuing to deliver electoral services and the new style canvass during this lockdown period.

Recommendations

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

For further information please contact Kate Crawford 0300 300 0150
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Appendix 1



Appendix 2

2016	Total Forms Issued	Door to Door
East Renfrewshire	54,991	10,774
Inverclyde	58,906	13,666
Renfrewshire	129,022	30,407
Total	242,919	54,847

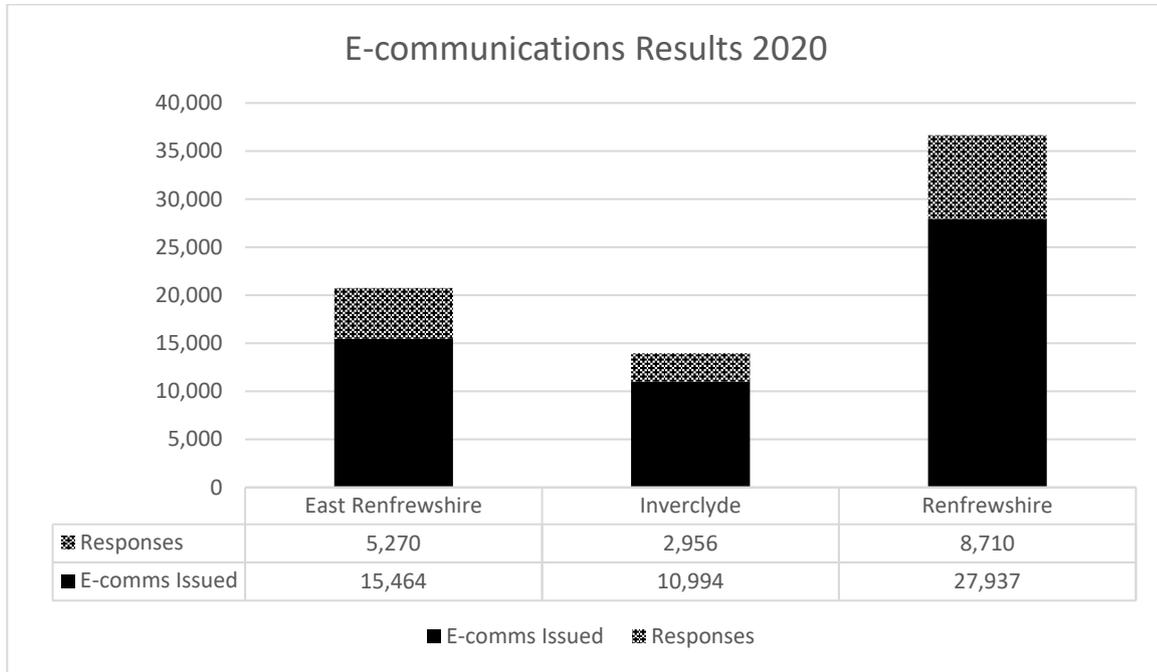
2017	Total Forms Issued	Door to Door
East Renfrewshire	59,529	6,267
Inverclyde	63,631	9,150
Renfrewshire	141,249	18,780
Total	264,409	34,197

2018	Total Forms Issued	Door to Door
East Renfrewshire	55,245	7,964
Inverclyde	56,525	10,587
Renfrewshire	125,798	23,927
Total	237,568	42,478

2019	Total Forms Issued	Door to Door
East Renfrewshire	56,423	10,647
Inverclyde	59,205	14,544
Renfrewshire	133,952	32,205
Total	249,580	57,396

2020	Total Forms Issued	Door to Door
East Renfrewshire	39,800	4,668
Inverclyde	44,759	7,466
Renfrewshire	96,121	15,067
Total	180,680	27,201

Appendix 3



Total number of e-comms issued was 54,395.