



# Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Report to:** Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

**Meeting on:** 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020

**Subject:** Electoral Update Report

**Author:** Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

## 1. Introduction

This report is to provide members with an update on the forthcoming enactment of the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and changes to the annual canvass.

## 2. New Legislation

- 2.1 Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act has brought in an extension to the franchise to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and Local government elections for foreign nationals. Allowing citizens of any country who are legally resident in Scotland the right to vote in devolved elections.

It is intended that the extension of the franchise to this new category of voter should result in as little practical change as possible in terms of electoral registration and administration. Foreign nationals will be able to register with exactly the same options as existing voters, such as via a declaration of local connection, and make use of existing processes for anonymous registration and postal and proxy votes where appropriate.

The Act also allows those prisoners sentenced to a term of 12 months or less to register to vote for both these devolved elections. This will apply to all “prisoners” who are detained in Scotland, including young offenders who are detained in young offender’s institutions. We are the first to register a prisoner under this legislation.

- 2.2 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 ERO’s we will add young people to the register once they have reached their fourteenth birthday. As with existing young people these attainers will not be published on the relevant register until they have reached voting age of 16 years old. Work on our Electoral Management System (EMS) to reflect these changes is ongoing.

## 3. Canvass Reform

- 3.1 Legislation has been made by the UK Government to allow the new style canvass to happen this summer. The Scottish Government have laid the necessary legislation to allow the changes to canvass in Scotland effective from 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

- 3.2 The main changes under this legislation allows the ERO to decide on different routes for canvassing households and will eventually lead to savings being made on the costs of the annual canvass. Training for this new style canvass is currently ongoing via our Electoral Management System (EMS) supplier and various staff members have been involved in these virtual training sessions.
- 3.3 Due to the Scottish Government's extension to the franchise, inclusion of foreign nationals and prisoners (serving less than 12 months), I intend to start the canvass by mid August this year. This will allow the final parts of the legislation and development of the EMS to have been successfully completed with staff training as required.
- 3.4 Decisions on whether we carry out the final part of canvass with the personal visit (door knock) have still to be made. In present circumstances it is difficult to see how this could safely be achieved I will be able to update the Board at the September meeting once further advice has been given. The personal visit phase of the canvass will not be taking place before late September/ early October in any case.

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

- 4.1 As a member of the Electoral Management Board (EMB) for Scotland I am on a working group looking at the potential issues and solutions for the next scheduled elections, that is the Scottish Parliamentary elections due in May 2021. Given the uncertainty, about being able to run elections in their current format, the EMB is tasked with looking at the election timetable and in particular postal votes as it is envisaged there may be a significant increase of these, or if the Government decides, this next election may be on an all postal basis.
- 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 staff will be able to deliver.

#### **5. Publication of Registers**

- 5.1 We have managed to produce monthly updates of the register, including the April Update which was especially important as it reflected Renfrewshire Council's new polling scheme. It should be noted that had we not moved to an Electoral management System (EMS) we could not have achieved all that we have in remote working, had we been using our previous In-House system.

#### **6. Elections**

- 6.1 The next planned elections are the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2021. Given the issues highlighted above and the continuing uncertainty of how future elections may be affected by the Covid crises, it is necessary to keep this as a watching brief at present.

#### **7. Ongoing Projects**

- 7.1 I am on both the Westminster and Scottish Government Accessibility Groups which are looking at ways to improve access to elections for a broad spectrum of people with varying issues around accessing registration and participation in elections. Both groups are investigating ways to be more inclusive and are looking at such things as aides to assist people with sight loss and those with mental health issues in accessing our services.

## **General Conclusions**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff for their hard work in continuing to deliver an electoral service during these unprecedented times.

## **Recommendations**

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

Kate A Crawford – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

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