



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Report to: Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board
Meeting on: 17th September 2021
Subject: Electoral Update Report - Canvass 2021
Author: Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1. Introduction

This report is to inform board members of changes, updates or new legislation affecting Electoral Registration.

2. New Legislation

- 2.1 There have been no further legislation changes enacted since the last report to the Board in May this year.
- 2.2 There is a UK Elections Bill out for consultation, this bill will only affect UK Parliamentary Elections and not reserved elections in Scotland. It includes a number of changes affecting electoral registration such as the introduction of Voter Identification, the Bill also proposes a 3-year renewal of Postal Vote applications, as opposed to the 5-year renewal at present. There are further proposed changes which would affect the Overseas franchise, removing the current 15-year rule and allowing anyone who is a British Citizen overseas who were previously registered or resident in the UK to be enfranchised. A response to the consultation has been prepared on behalf of ERO's in Scotland and submitted to both the UK and Scottish Governments.
- 2.3 A watching brief will be kept on this and any other proposed legislation.

3. Canvass 2021

- 3.1 This is now the second year of the reformed canvass. This new canvass has been legislated for the whole of the UK. This year we started our canvass a little earlier as we were able to carry out our data matching with DWP earlier than last year.
- 3.2 As reported to the Board in September last year 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.

If 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 the last group of properties which uses the Route3 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 as required.

- 3.3 Please see **Appendix 1** showing the totals of forms posted in the last 6 years to see what the difference is comparing both last year's 2020 and this year's new canvass to previous years. If we average the number of forms from 2016-2019, the number issued this year is approximately 71% of what we issued previously, last year the figure was 72%. This shows that the new style canvass is showing cost savings again this year by cutting down on printing and postage costs and staff resources in issuing reminders.
- 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 four years prior to the new canvass starting last year, so taking 2016-2019 figures from this graph, and assuming we canvass circa 24,000 households this year, this results in us carrying out only 51% of the four-year average prior to the introduction of this new canvass. This is also a reduction from 57% for the Door-to-Door canvass in 2020. So once again the changes to the canvass are producing further benefits in time and resources required for door-to-door visits.
- 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. Unfortunately, due to the timing of writing this report and the part of the cycle we are in in the canvass workflow I am unable to show the breakdown by unitary authority for 2021.
- 3.6 A further innovation for this new style 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 83,000 e-comms which is a significant increase on last year's figure of around 55,000 the response rate from both years is sitting around the high teens, this 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.
- 3.7 This year we also managed to conduct a telephone canvass for just over 5,000 electors who had supplied a telephone number and given their consent to being contacted by this means. This is still ongoing at the time of writing this report and we have around 1,800 remaining. It is hoped that this method along with the e-communication method will continue to grow and assist in delivering further savings.

- 3.8 The final part of the canvass is the personal visit phase, also known as the Door-to-Door part of the canvass. I have purchased a number of tablets to allow this year's canvass to be carried out without the requirement of around 24,000 letters and forms to be produced. I have also decided not to employ external canvassers this year and our own staff (including the temporary staff which we were able to employ in the run up to May's election) will now be our in-house canvassers. The newly purchased tablets carry all the information electronically and do away with the requirement of handling paperwork. The information from the tablets is uploaded in real time to our EMS and means there is no paperwork to be processed by staff back in the office which was previously the case in the methodology when using paper forms. Training has begun for those involved and plans made on how to tackle these door-to-door visits, these visits will begin around the middle of this month. However, this is based on current restrictions remaining at a level whereby personal visits are allowed and are safe to do so for both the staff and the public. This will be closely monitored and should circumstances, or government advice change then adaptations will be made to ensure everyone's safety and wellbeing.

4. Future Elections

- 4.1 The next scheduled election is set for May 2022 - Local Government Election. Preparations at a national level are well underway for this election as in this particular election the count is done electronically, and the printing contract is with one supplier also, so a little different from other elections.

As far as RVJB is concerned our Electoral Management System (EMS) will be updated as required to cope with this election. I am the chair of the Scottish User Group of our particular EMS and we co-ordinate and share ideas at a bimonthly meeting to ensure we are all sharing best practice and delivering the best service.

A close watch will be taken on volumes of Postal Vote applications ahead of this election; however, the uptake of postal votes may well be affected by whatever COVID restrictions (or not) are in place. A very high proportion of the postal vote applications at this year's Scottish Parliamentary election were for the permanent postal voting option so those particular electors are already noted as postal voters for the upcoming election which should assist in the management and processing of any new applications.

- 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 The post canvass register is due to be published on 1st December, however, monthly updates have continued to be published during the canvass period and these have been distributed to all interested parties.

6. Ongoing Projects

- 6.1 I am on both the UK Government and Scottish Government Accessibility Groups, these groups are still meeting, virtually. It has been very beneficial to have been a member of both to help understand the issues facing 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 not only a successful election in May but electoral services in general including this new style canvass, during this period of restrictions caused by the COVID pandemic. It is to the whole staff employed by the Board that credit is due that we have managed to keep all our services running during these difficult times.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have been the ERO for RVJB and I wish my successor and all the staff at RVJB every success for the future.

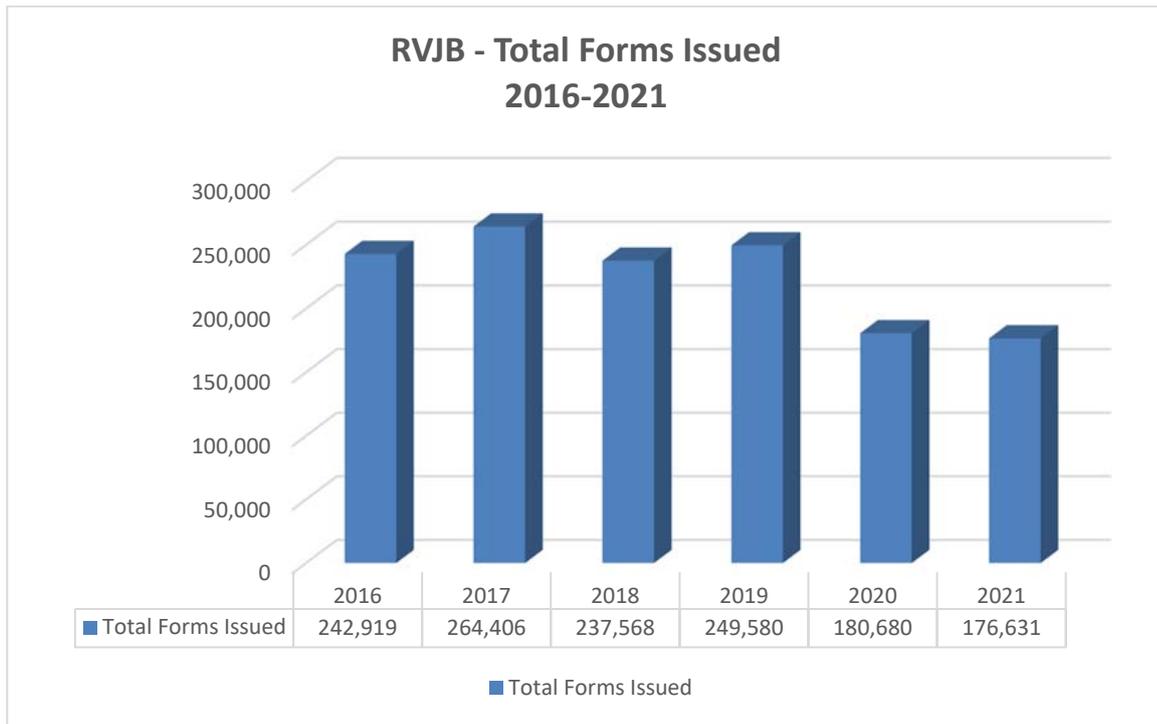
Recommendations

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

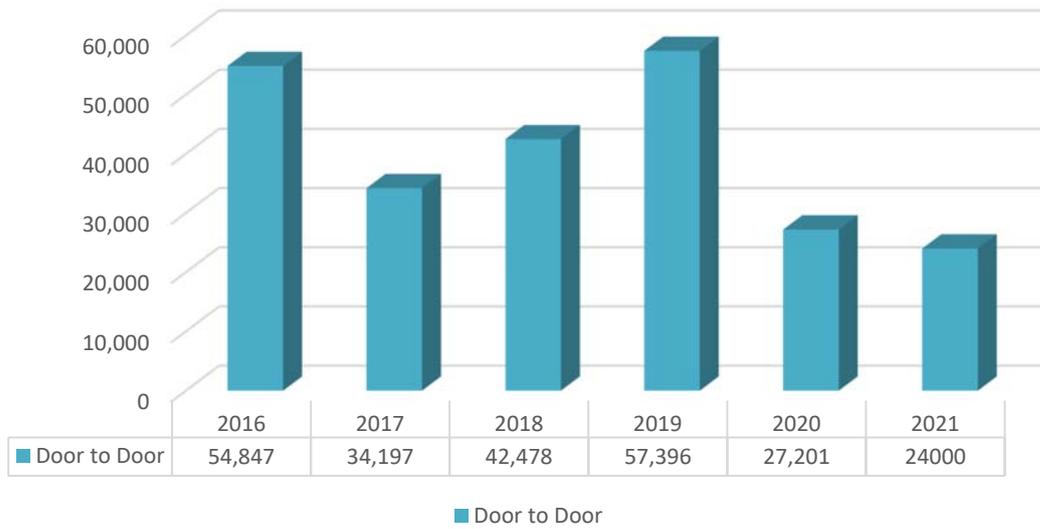
Kate Crawford
Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
3rd September 2021

For further information please contact Kate Crawford 0300 300 0150
Or via e-mail at kate.crawford@renfrewshire-vjb.gov.uk

Appendix 1



**RVJB - Door to Door
2016-2021**



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

2021 *	Total Forms Issued	Door to Door
East Renfrewshire	N/A *	N/A *
Inverclyde	N/A *	N/A *
Renfrewshire	N/A *	N/A *
Total	176,631	Circa 24,000 *

2021* Due to timing of report and cycle of canvass it has not been possible to break these figures down for this year. Therefore a total has been shown for the whole of the Joint Board area. The final figure for the personal visit (door to door) canvass is also an estimate due to the timing of writing this report , but it is not expected that the final figure will vary substantially from this estimate .