



Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Report to: Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board

Meeting on: 28^h May 2021

Subject: Electoral Update Report

Author: Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1. Introduction

This report is to inform board members of any updates to Electoral Registration legislation and report to the Board on any electoral events.

2. Scottish Parliament Election - 6th May 2021

- 2.1 This election was unique in the history of electoral events given the circumstances that we found ourselves in with limited access for staff to the office, remote working and carrying out our usual preparations via online meetings. However, the successful delivery of this election was made possible by robust internal preparations such as project planning, carrying out risk assessments, updating our election specific risk register, holding regular meetings with our three RO's teams and attending Renfrewshire Council's Election Board meetings.
- 2.2 As reported to the Board in February the Scottish Government had passed legislation in the form of the Scottish General Election (Coronavirus) Act 2020 which allowed for the separation of the registration cut off deadline from the postal vote cut off. The postal vote cut off was on the 6th of April, whilst the cut off to register was 19th April. This was to assist ERO's with any surge in postal vote applications and ensure higher volumes of these applications could be processed in time for the election. This turned out to be particularly helpful in managing the volumes of postal vote applications received. (see tables 1 and 2 below.)
- 2.3 Alongside this change in the electoral timetable the Scottish Government also funded the ERO's to issue Household Notification Letters which were sent at the beginning of February to every household in the joint board area. On this letter the occupants were notified of who was registered at this address and of those registered who had a postal vote already in place. We did see a spike in postal vote applications after these were issued which also helped manage workloads, having this rise in applications early enough to ensure these were all processed in time and allow staff to cope with future spikes.
- 2.4 At the same time, myself and fellow ERO's across Scotland procured TV advertising to promote the change to the cut off dates and to alert the electorate to the fact that they had a choice in how they wished to vote in these elections, the strap line was "Plan today so you can vote in May ". The campaign on STV and ITV ran from the 1st of February – 16th February and then again from the 13th March to the 27th March. Reporting from both STV and ITV showed that these were very successful adverts and they were seen by a large proportion of the electorate.

2.5 The final major change was as reported in February that we were given funding to employ temporary staff to assist with the election, not just the expected rise in postal vote applications but also to help with the fact we were operating in a mix of remote and minimal office-based working. The staff employed through this project have proven to be a positive addition to our existing staff. Along with our own board staff everyone has been exceptional in helping deliver this election, it was a very good example of team working. All staff whether directly working for the election or ensuring our other key services were delivered made a positive contribution to ensure the overall successful delivery of it.

As can be seen from the tables below we did receive an increase in postal vote applications across all three councils. The first table shows the statistics for this election and to put that in context I have included the table below which shows how things stood at the last election which was the UKPGE in December 2019.

TABLE 1

Scottish Constituency (May 2021)	Total Electorate	Of which are Postal Voters	PV as a %of total electorate
Eastwood	56,074	16,645	29.68%
Greenock & Inverclyde	57,384	13,291	23.16%
Paisley	56,070	13,145	23.44%
Renfrewshire North & West	56,472	13,623	24.12%
Renfrewshire South	53,012	12,227	23.06%
TOTAL	279,012	68,931	24.71%

TABLE 2

UK Parliamentary Constituency (Dec 2019)	Total Electorate	Of which are Postal Voters	PV as a %of total electorate
East Renfrewshire	71,612	14,266	19.92%
Inverclyde	59,516	10,874	18.27%
Paisley & Renfrewshire North	70,605	12,354	17.49%
Paisley & Renfrewshire South	62,935	11,739	18.65%
TOTAL	264,668	49,233	18.60%

2.6 As can be seen, our overall total registered electorate has increased since December 2019, this is partly due to more people registering but is also due in part to the different franchises between a UKPGE and a Scottish Parliament Election (SPE). Following the Scottish Government's extension to the franchise for Scottish elections in 2020, the result was that a number of prisoners, who if serving less than a 12month term, could register to vote and Foreign Nationals who are resident in Scotland could also now take part, along with, as in previous Scottish Elections anyone aged 16yrs old on polling day being able to register too.

Care should be taken therefore in making too direct a comparison, however, the increase from the total of 18.6% to 24.71% for the whole of the Joint Board area still shows that postal voting was a popular choice and the vast majority of these are permanent postal voting requests, that means going forward the board will have around 25% of registered electors wishing to vote by post permanently.

3. Lessons Learned

As with any project it is invaluable to have meetings with all the stakeholders involved and we have arranged “wash up” meetings with the three RO’s representatives to produce actions for future elections and learn lessons on what can be improved on.

Internally, we also conduct follow up meetings and produce an action log and tailor processes to ensure we achieve one of our key aims of constant improvement to our service delivery.

4. Canvass

4.1 Preparations for the Canvass have already begun, and we intend to start the canvass by the beginning of July.

4.2 This year’s canvass follows the new format that was introduced last summer, and we intend to build on lessons learned from last year’s event to assist in delivering an even more efficient canvass this year. We will be extending our use of contact by alternative means such as email for those electors who have asked for this and we will also extend contact by phone, both of these as part of the overall canvass will contribute in helping to keep costs down whilst not risking the integrity of the information captured.

We are planning to do more in-house data matching alongside these other methods to ensure we have as current information as possible allowing us to the target under registered groups and areas where we have historically had low returns.

By utilising all these methods, we will then be able to ensure that, government guidelines permitting, we can concentrate on those non responders by carrying out a door-to-door canvass only where these other methods have failed to capture possible electors, in the late summer/ early autumn.

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. Ongoing Projects

6.1 I am still involved with 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 a variety of needs to ensure we are as inclusive as possible when creating our registers and inviting electors to participate in electoral events.

I am also on various Cabinet Office working groups which consider various aspects of electoral registration such as Overseas Electors, making the online registration/applying for a postal vote process easier and I’ve recently been invited to join a working group exploring the use of Voter ID at future Westminster elections.

I am a member of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland and find this a very useful forum to share knowledge and ideas with Returning Officer staff and ERO colleagues.

General Conclusions

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff for delivering another successful election in the most trying of circumstances, all credit to their professionalism and “can do” attitude which ensured we delivered our part in this election process.

Recommendations

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

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