



AGENDA ITEM 4

CENTRAL SCOTLAND VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Subject: Electoral Registration Update
Meeting: Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board
Date: 23rd January 2015
Author: Pete Wildman, Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The last 12 months have been a period of significant Electoral Registration activity for the organisation and it is appropriate to update the Board on the work that has been carried out in this period.
- 1.2 With the forthcoming UK Parliamentary General Election and the first full canvass under Individual Electoral Registration (IER) occurring in 2015 this report also highlights the likely impact of these events.

2.0 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION – MAY 2014

- 2.1 This election was held on the 22 May 2014, there were no significant problems arising with the registration of electors or with the issue of absent votes.
- 2.2 The publication of the Register of Electors was delayed by the UK Government in 2013 due to the forthcoming introduction of IER in the autumn of 2014. Instead of publishing the Register on the 1 December 2013 the publication date was delayed until 10 March 2014. This resulted in a very quick turnaround from completing all the “year end” processes associated with the production of the Register and the start of the processes associated with an Election e.g. Absent Vote and Poll Card data supplies. This had a noticeable impact on the workload of the team.
- 2.3 After the European Election I was required by law to write out to all permanent postal voters whose vote had been rejected due to the absence of a personal identifier or a mismatch between the personal identifier on the postal vote statement and the personal identifier on the postal vote record held by myself. This was the first time I had been formally required to do so and the response to it was positive.

3.0 SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM – SEPTEMBER 2014

- 3.1 This proved to be the most significant electoral event that any member of the organisation has ever experienced. It was very good to see how the electorate engaged in such an important electoral event. However the level of engagement meant an unprecedented workload for the whole organisation. I am pleased to say that we delivered and my thanks go to all the staff here for their commitment and hard work to ensure that we were able to meet the needs of the electorate.
- 3.2 It was clear even before the European Elections that public interest in the referendum was going to be very high indeed. The workload was such that we had to start overtime working in July some two months ahead of the Referendum. This is unprecedented and the volume of work continued to climb. By the middle of August we had to draft in the help of the Valuation Team to assist in answering phone calls and issuing Registration and Absent Vote forms. By the last few weeks ahead of the Referendum the whole organisation was dealing with Electoral Registration work. It was necessary to work very long hours in the final weeks with many staff staying on until late in the night and working at weekends to ensure deadlines were met.
- 3.3 On the final day for registering we had 700 visitors to our office, with the last visitors appearing at 11:50 pm just prior to the midnight cut-off. There was also a huge volume of e-mails and calls to be dealt with and the staff had to move quickly to ensure all electors were added to the Register and Postal Votes were added in time for the files to be sent to the printers.
- 3.4 The volume of work normally diminishes slightly after the last date for Registration and Postal Votes with less interest in the appointment of proxies. This was not the case with the Referendum with a very high number of requests for proxy and emergency proxy appointments. This continued right up until 5.00pm on Referendum Day.
- 3.5 The Referendum also brought with it the Register of Young Voters. This process ran smoothly and the Depute ERO and I visited the local High Schools to promote awareness and we plan to do the same in future years.
- 3.6 The number of Postal Votes rose from just over 22000 when the Register was published to just over 33000 by the date of the Referendum.
- 3.7 The Board incurred exceptional overtime costs and an increase in postage costs. Along with the other EROs in Scotland I will be making a bid to the Scottish Government for the repayment of these unexpected costs.

4.0 INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

- 4.1 The day after the Referendum saw the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in Scotland. It had been introduced in England on 10 June 2014. Instead of one person in a household registering all electors in that household every elector must make an individual application. Every applicant must prove their identity by supplying their Date of Birth and National Insurance Number. These are checked against Government records and if they fail to match then the individual has to produce further proofs of identity such as passport, driving licence etc., if they cannot produce these documents then their application has to be attested.
- 4.2 To smooth the transition to the new system the whole Register was matched against government and local government records. Where electors successfully matched they were automatically transferred to the new system. For those who did not match they have been invited to register. If they fail to register they will remain on the Register until after the UK Parliamentary Election but will then be removed. Any one from now onwards who wishes to have an absent vote or act as a proxy must be registered under the new system.
- 4.3 In October we issued 196000 Confirmation letters to those electors who had matched. We achieved a high match rate of 93%, we have issued Invitation to Register to 21000 electors and also issued 18000 Household Enquiry Forms. Every form issued and not returned must be followed up with two reminders and a personal visit. If new names are added to a Household Enquiry Form they cannot be added to the Register. Instead we have to issue each new applicant with an Invitation to Register and follow up with reminders and a visit.
- 4.4 IER has seen the introduction of online registration at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. This has proved popular. We have now issued reminders to all outstanding forms and are now in the process of carrying out personal visits with second reminders. The Electoral Commission has made it very clear that they expect every outstanding form to have been followed up with a personal visit. We have employed 19 temporary canvassers on a full time basis for two months and an additional 13 part time canvassers. The University has its own dedicated canvassers due to the need to follow up on some 3500 invitations.
- 4.5 The Confirmation letter raised the electorate's awareness of the difference between the Open and Full Registers and we have received 9000 requests to opt out of the Open Register.
- 4.6 It is looking likely that at the end of the canvass period we will issue a Household Notification Letter to all properties to advise who is registered. The new Register will be published on 27 February 2015.
- 4.7 Due to the number of forms that have to be issued under IER and that every non returned form has to be followed up with a visit has resulted in a significant increase in costs as detailed in the Budget report.

5.0 FUTURE WORK

- 5.1 We are already working closely with the Returning Officers to prepare for the UK Parliamentary General Election. This will be the first election under IER. Whilst the Register has a high number of electors on it due to the interest in the referendum there will still be a high number of new applications due to people moving home etc. All these new applicants will need to match against government records or produce further proof of identity. How this will operate in practice in the last few days before the registration cut off for the General Election remains to be seen.
- 5.2 We will have to write out after the Register has been published to all electors with an absent vote who have not successfully transitioned to advise them that they must register again and re-apply for their absent vote. Given the short time between Register publication on 27 February 2015 and the last date (20 April 2015) to apply for a postal vote in time for the General Election this will be a particular challenge. We will also have to handle the tight turnaround between Register publication and election preparations.
- 5.3 We will also have to write again to those absent voters whose signatures did not match at the European even though they may have matched at the Referendum.
- 5.4 We will commence the next annual canvass on 1 July 2015 with the new Register being published on 1 December 2015. The canvass will involve sending a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to all 135000 residential properties with associated reminders and visits. Any new electors identified from returned HEFs will be issued with an Invitation to Register to be followed up by reminders and visits.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Members are invited to note and comment on this report

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Pete Wildman
Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer
Date: 13th January 2015