

AGENDA ITEM 3

CENTRAL SCOTLAND VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Subject: Elections Report
Meeting: Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board
Date: 4th March, 2011
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report outlines the planning and procedures in place for the forthcoming election and referendum on 5th May, 2011.

2. REPORT ON ELECTORAL WORK

- 2.1 At every election Electoral Registration Officer's (ERO) staff contact Returning Officer's (RO) staff in each council to start preparation for the election.
- 2.2 The Returning Officer is responsible in law for running the election, however local practice has evolved so that some of the RO's duties are undertaken by staff in the Registration Office (mainly in relation to Polling Cards). The ERO also has specific duties that have to be carried out prior to an election. This report is to highlight the many tasks which are needed and the necessary timetable to deliver a successful election to all stakeholders.
- 2.3 For the referendum the RO acts also as Counting Officer (CO) under a Chief Counting Officer (CCO) and Regional Counting Officer (RCO).

3. ELECTION DETAILS

- 3.1 A registration and electoral management system (EROS) was purchased in 2006 which all three Returning Officers and the ERO's staff use. It is essential that we work together to ensure that when the election is added to the computer system it has the correct eligible dates and the correct electors are able to vote in that type of election (European citizens, Lords and Overseas Electors have restricted voting rights).

4. POLL CARDS

- 4.1 The Depute ERO arranges with our selected printer for the printing and postage of all poll cards and postal poll cards for an election. Because of the smaller volumes the ERO arranges for the in-house printing and local posting of poll cards to postal proxy voters, proxy voters and anonymous electors.
- 4.2 The Depute ERO is normally the contact with Royal Mail for arrangements on the issue of poll cards. (He must ensure the correct license and artwork is quoted on each poll card – ROs each ensure they have the relevant license for posting the poll cards).
- 4.3 RO Staff and senior ERO staff consult in the design of the poll cards with printers and where variable data is allowed decide what information and dates should be printed on the poll cards. This is usually the last dates for registration, applying for a postal vote, applying for a proxy vote, obtaining a replacement ballot paper etc. along with the contact details for enquiries or obtaining forms.
- 4.4 It is normally the ERO's contact details which are listed on each different type of poll card as the majority of telephone calls and emails received in response to the poll cards are registration or absent voting enquiries.
- 4.5 The ERO and ROs agree dates when test data files are created and sent to the printers as well as when the live data is sent.
- 4.6 Each RO has to create a polling scheme for an election and the polling scheme must be added to the database before poll cards are created. The polling scheme lists the polling place for each street/address and is printed on the poll card.
- 4.7 All the printing costs plus the postage costs of the poll cards sent locally require to be identified for each RO as the ERO arranges payment and then has to arrange for an invoice to be sent for payment to each RO. Poll cards are created and posted before an election register is finalised. For 5th May election this year our poll card data will be sent to the printers on 11th March for posting no later than 28th March but the last date for registration is 15th April. The ERO therefore has to ensure that he has a system to identify the electors who require a poll card or letter because their details have been amended since the poll cards were printed.
- 4.8 Should a change to a polling place be made after the poll cards are printed then RO staff can make the database change and if time permits contact the ERO to request that new poll cards are printed and posted.

5. ABSENT VOTING

- 5.1 This includes voting by post, proxy and postal proxy. All applications to vote by post or by proxy are dealt with by ERO staff. Any forms received by RO staff must be forwarded to the ERO to check and action as necessary.
- 5.2 The receipt of “duplicate” postal vote forms for existing postal voters can impact detrimentally on processing new valid applications due to the time spent checking these forms (legally they must replace the previous application therefore they must be scanned and updated). Dependent on the printer chosen by the RO the ERO must supply data on postal voters to them when required for printing the necessary ballot papers and security statements. Currently the Stirling RO has contracted with a supplier to print and issue ballot papers and they require delivery of data as soon as possible after the close of applications at 5pm on 14th April. Both Falkirk & Clackmannanshire ROs have contracted with another supplier to print ballot papers and they require data on 30th March and a supplementary list and a list of alterations on 15th April.
- 5.3 The ERO staff must keep lists of any cancellations or amendments by existing postal voters from the dates information is sent to the printers to ensure that they are withdrawn before issue or amended. As the RO employs the printer it is the responsibility of the RO staff to ensure that the printers carry out their instructions as required.
- 5.4 The Chair of the Electoral Commission is the Chief Counting Officer (CCO) for the referendum on 5th May and has directed that ballot papers for the referendum and Scottish Parliament election should be posted on 18th April, but that applications for electors not included in the 1st April Register of Electors cannot be posted until 27th April (those registered by 10th March on 18th April those registered by 15th April on 27th April).
- 5.5 All applications for a postal vote must be issued with a written acknowledgement from the ERO.
- 5.6 All applications received too late for an election must be advised in writing by the ERO as soon as possible. Letters are issued which, if appropriate, advise of the entitlement to apply to vote by proxy before the relevant closing date.

6. ISSUE OF POSTAL BALLOT PAPERS

- 6.1 This is an RO function which they arrange with their appointed printers. Replacement ballot papers are issued locally by RO staff.

7. REGISTRATION OF ELECTORS

- 7.1 All applications to register to vote are processed by ERO staff. Applications are now accepted if received by post, in person, by fax and by scanned email attachments. Applications received by midnight eleven working days before polling day must be included in the Register of Electors being used on polling day (15th April, 2011 for 5th May, 2011 elections). Any incomplete applications or refused applications must be informed as soon as possible to enable the elector to supply the required information. This year because of Easter Monday not being included in the registration timetable the last date for registration in time for 5th May is thirty one hours after the last date for receipt of postal vote applications. This may require arrangements being made by RO staff and printers to deal with any current postal voter changing their registration address between 5pm 14th April and midnight 15th April.

8. SUPPLY OF REGISTERS AND ABSENT VOTE LISTS

- 8.1 Legislation allows candidates and political parties and registered referendum campaign groups to obtain copies of the Register of Electors and absent vote lists prior to the election. The ERO prepares an application form and information for candidates advising the dates on which he/she will make lists available and in which formats. Candidates and parties are encouraged to obtain the lists as soon as possible and so ensure that existing postal voters are not contacted with new applications when they are not required. The ROs are also supplied with the relevant Registers and absent vote lists that they require for the election and referendum.

9. POLLING STATION REGISTERS

- 9.1 Prior to the election, dates are agreed with the ROs as to when they require polling station registers to be made available to them. The layout of the registers and which records are highlighted or “scored through” are agreed prior to printing. ERO staff then arrange the printing of the required registers, absent vote lists and if necessary streets lists for each polling station and ensure they are delivered by the required dates.

10. TRAINING

- 10.1 ERO staff have provided information on the Register of Electors for inclusion in training manuals for polling station staff and offer their services at RO training sessions. ERO staff have offered to take part in any education initiatives being organised locally and nationally on election matters.

11. CROSS BOUNDARY ISSUES

- 11.1 When elections cross local authority boundaries then arrangements need to be made with the ERO and RO responsible for the “outwith” area to ensure that data is received from them or sent to them when required and in the correct formats.

12. ENQUIRIES

- 12.1 Electors contact the ERO by email, telephone, by letter and by calling at our office. Advice and forms are made available to them as requested. Once the various dates are known for issue of ballot papers staff are informed so they can advise electors whether a postal or proxy vote is appropriate for this election. The relevant last dates and times are highlighted in order that the elector knows the importance of returning fully completed forms promptly.

13. POLLING DAY

- 13.1 ERO staff provide a service to the electorate and ROs from 7am to 10pm on every polling day. As part of their training, staff in polling stations are given the ERO contact details to allow them to contact us with any questions on behalf of electors regarding registration entitlement. Any clerical errors identified have to be granted by the ERO and communicated to the polling staff, RO and elector. Any applications for an Emergency Proxy must be received before 5pm and again the ERO must communicate his/her decision to the RO and polling station staff as well as the elector. ERO I.T. staff are also available from 7am to 10pm to ensure that advice on the database is available to all staff.

14. PUBLICITY

- 14.1 ERO staff issue press releases regarding the election timetable, and work with RO staff, Council communication staff and the Electoral Commission on publicising elections.

15. TIMETABLE FOR 5TH MAY, 2011

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| 10 th March | Last date for registration for 1 st April update to Register of Electors. |
| 11 th March | Data file to printers for poll card printing. |
| 28 th March | Date by which CCO requires poll cards to be posted. |
| 14 th April | 5pm last date and time for receipt of valid postal vote application. |

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| | Postal vote data to be issued to Stirling as soon as possible after all applications processed after 5pm. |
| 15 th April | Midnight last date and time for receipt of valid application to register to vote in time for 5 th May election. |
| 18 th April | Date by which CCO requires ROs and printers to issue postal vote packs to valid postal voters (those registered by 10 th March). |
| 21 st April | 5pm last date and time for receipt of a valid application to vote by proxy on 5 th May. |
| 22 nd April | Public Holiday |
| 25 th April | Public Holiday |
| 26 th April | Last date for receipt of any objection to an application to register to vote prior to 5 th May election. |
| 28 th April | Date by which CCO requires ROs and printers to issue all remaining postal vote packs (including those registered after 10 th March). |
| 29 th April | Public Holiday |
| 2 nd May | Public Holiday |
| 5 th May | Polling day 7am to 10pm. |
| 5.00 p.m. | Last applications for proxy due to medical emergency. |
| 9.00 p.m. | Last time to alter the Register due to clerical error. |
| 10 th May | Last date for registration for 1 st June update to Register of Electors. |

16. POST ELECTION

- 16.1 Rechargeable costs are identified and invoices prepared for ROs. Applications which were too late to register for 5th May and valid postal vote applications for all elections are updated. Electors are deleted from information received and application forms issued to potential new electors from information received. After the election letters can be sent to postal voters to review their signatures, dates of birth if existing applications were rejected.

17. RECOMMENDATION

- 17.1 The Valuation Joint Board is asked to note the report.

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 Date : 11th February, 2011

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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