

Agenda Item 9

Electoral Registration Update



AGENDA ITEM 9

CENTRAL SCOTLAND VALUATION JOINT BOARD

Subject: Electoral Registration Update
Meeting: Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board
Date: 25th September 2020
Author: Pete Wildman, Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is to update the Board on Electoral Registration work that has been carried out since March 2020.
- 1.2 The report also provides an update on ongoing and future work

2.0 EXTENSION OF FRANCHISE

- 2.1 The Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 enfranchised convicted prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or less and all foreign nationals resident in Scotland with leave to remain. The change in respect of prisoners was effective from 1 April 2020 and the change in respect of foreign nationals was effective from 3 August 2020.
- 2.2 The SAA have worked closely with other partners such as the Scottish Government and the Electoral Commission to ensure that forms and computer systems have been updated to reflect these changes. There has been engagement with national organisations such as Scottish Prison Service, Scottish Refugee Council and COSLA to identify appropriate data sources and promote awareness of the changes.
- 2.3 At a local level we have included an A5 “flyer” with all paper canvass communications, highlighting the extension of the franchise to include foreign nationals. We have also engaged with the Central Scotland Race Equality Council to promote awareness of the change. We will be writing to any eligible prisoners who are not already registered inviting them to register to vote.



3.0 ANNUAL CANVASS 2020

- 3.1 This is the first canvass to be delivered under the new canvass legislation. The new legislation is less prescriptive than the previous legislation which gives Electoral Registration Officers greater flexibility to adapt the canvass to suit their own local area's demographics.
- 3.2 Before the canvass commenced we had to match our register to the Department of Work and Pensions database, we also opted to match our register to our local Council Tax and Schools databases.
- 3.3 Where all electors in a property matched against another database, the property was put into "Route 1". Where one or more electors did not match the property was put into "Route 2". For larger type establishments such as Care Homes and University Accommodation these were put into "Route 3". The table below shows the split across Central Scotland.

Route	Number of Properties	%
1	111,510	77%
2	30,845	21%
3	2,346	2%
Total	144,701	

- 3.4 For properties in "Route 1" where we held an email address for one or more electors we issued an email asking them to confirm that the details we hold are correct and to notify us of any changes. Where we didn't hold an email address for any of the electors or we didn't get a response to our email we have issued a paper communication advising who is registered at the property and asking people to only respond if there has been a change. We will not be doing any follow up activity for properties in Route 1. We issued emails to 68,368 properties and have received 19,258 responses which equates to 28% of all properties
- 3.5 For those properties in Route 2 we have issued a letter asking them to go online and confirm if the details we hold are correct and to notify us of any changes. As at the 15 September 2020 we had received responses from 31% of the properties to the initial communication. If we don't get a response to this communication we will issue a full canvass form, if that fails to get a response we will try and contact by phone any elector in the property who has matched against other records. If that is not possible then the plan is to visit the property, however due to the pandemic we will make a decision on whether to do property visits based on Scottish Government, Electoral Commission and Public Health Scotland advice at the time and following a full risk assessment.



- 3.6 For those properties in Route 3 we will make direct contact with the organisation responsible for the property and obtain the information we require directly rather than via a property communication.
- 3.7 As this is the first year of the new style canvass we will do a full review at the end of the canvass to establish what has worked and what hasn't worked. As Board members are aware there were some issues with the wording of emails.
- 3.8 The Scottish Government and the UK Government are in the process of legislating to allow publication of the Register to be delayed until 1 February due to the pandemic. We are planning to publish our Register as usual on 1 December but it is very welcome to have the option to delay if unforeseen circumstances arise.

4.0 OTHER WORK

- 4.1 The team will work closely with the University of Stirling to promote registration amongst students and team members attended the annual Fresher's event. We will also attend virtual events at Forth Valley College.
- 4.2 We are working closely with the Returning Officer at Clackmannanshire Council and her team to prepare for the forthcoming Council by-election on 19th November 2020. We are anticipating an increase in postal vote applications and Emergency Proxy applications. The rules around Emergency Proxies are being relaxed to allow people who develop Covid-19 or have to self-isolate after the cut-off date for ordinary proxy vote applications to get a proxy vote without having to get their application attested. The by-election will provide assistance in our planning for the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021
- 4.3 The Covid -19 pandemic meant that we had to invoke the Board's Business Continuity procedures. We were able to facilitate home working for all our employees and electoral work has continued as usual with the Register being updated monthly, Invitations to Register being issued and the Canvass being conducted. One employee attends Hillside House on a weekly basis to open and scan the mail.

5.0 FUTURE WORK

- 5.1 From 1 October 2020, all 14 year olds will be able to register as attainers on the Local Government Register. This will make communication with potential electors clearer and easier.



- 5.2 The SAA is working closely with the Scottish Government, the Electoral Management Board and the Electoral Commission to prepare for the Scottish Parliament Election in May 2021. We are anticipating a significant increase in applications for postal votes particularly in the last few weeks ahead of the election. We are therefore developing local plans to increase staffing and to be able to operate a blended model of home and office working to ensure there is sufficient resilience.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Members are invited to consider and comment on this report.

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Pete Wildman
Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer
Date: 25th September 2020