

FALKIRK COUNCIL

SUBJECT: EXTENSION OF FRANCHISE TO 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS
MEETING: EDUCATION EXECUTIVE
DATE: 10 NOVEMBER 2015
AUTHOR: DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- update the Education Executive on the recent legislative changes that have been made in Scotland that give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in both Scottish and local elections; and
- provide information and examples on how Children's Services are working with schools and the Electoral Registration Officer on helping to promote and encourage young people to vote.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2015 lowered the voting age for Scottish and local elections to 16, following the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds in the franchise for the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014. As part of the 2015 voter registration programme, the Electoral Commission and Electoral Registration Officers across Scotland have been targeting young people aged 14 and over to encourage them to register to vote.

2.2 Children's Services have supported these efforts in two ways:

- by working directly with the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) at Central Scotland Joint Valuation Board to facilitate information sharing to support their work; and
- by promoting registration amongst young people in the Falkirk area.

2.3 In May 2015, the ERO approached Children's Services seeking to establish a data sharing process to provide his office with regular transfers of pupil information to support the registration process. The ERO is entitled to this information by law, but it was necessary to establish a Data Sharing Agreement with Central Scotland Joint Valuation Board to ensure compliance with data protection legislation. This process has now been completed, with the data sharing agreement in place and the first data transfer took place in September 2015.

- 2.4 Children's Services has also worked with the ERO and Electoral Commission to distribute promotional materials, such as "Are you in?" campaign posters, to all secondary schools and to facilitate links between the ERO and schools. Falkirk Council, Children's Services and schools have also used social media, particularly Twitter, to promote voter registration.
- 2.5 Schools are undertaking a range of activities to raise awareness amongst their pupils. All schools are including issues around voter registration as part of either Personal and Social Education (PSE) or Modern Studies classes and the ERO has offered to speak at any school who would like his assistance. Other activities that took place in some of our schools to help raise awareness of voter registration in schools include:
- arranging "drop in" sessions for pupils who felt they required help registering to vote.
 - addressing voter registration in PSE classes and provide pupils with the opportunity to register on line, with support if necessary, afterwards.
 - participation in the national launch of the "Are you in?" campaign, as well as including registration information in senior assemblies. Pupils were given time during class to register and the School Captains provided drop-in sessions for pupils who needed support to register.
- 2.6 Particular attention has been given to working with young people with additional support needs or who are looked after. Some examples of this work are:
- Mariner Support Service have discussed political and democratic processes and the importance of voting with all pupils.
 - Carrongrange School has invited the ERO to speak to senior pupils and will follow up with pupils. They have accessed materials produced with Enable at the time of the 2014 referendum and found these useful resources for their pupils.
 - Children and Families Division are working with Looked After Children to raise awareness of voter registration with them.

Children's Services will continue to work closely with the ERO to support his work. The service will also in line with Education Scotland guidance continue to encourage young people to register to vote and to participate in democratic processes.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4. HR IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The Education Executive is asked to:

- (i) note the content of this report; and
- (ii) instruct the Director of Children's Services to continue to work with schools and other parties to encourage young people to register to vote and to participate in democratic process.

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Director of Children's Services

Date: 27 October 2015

Contact Officer: Megan Farr, Policy Officer, ext 6671

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL