

**REPORT TO: TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD – 15 JUNE 2015**

**REPORT ON: ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

**REPORT BY: ASSESSOR**

**REPORT NO: TVJB 13-2015**

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report seeks to update members on recent electoral registration issues relating to the Introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and the General Election which took place on 7 May 2015.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Board note:

- That Individual Electoral Registration commenced in Scotland with effect from 19 September 2014.
- That pre-existing electors who had responded to the previous year's canvass and were matched to the DWP database were automatically transferred in to the new Register. "Invitation to Register" forms were issued to all electors who were not successfully matched and "Household Enquiry Forms" were issued to all households where there were no or incomplete details of the electors who may reside at that property. Reminder forms were issued to non responding electors and households as required and, where no response was forthcoming, a door to door canvass was undertaken.
- That following these procedures the Electoral Register was successfully published on 27 February 2015 and was an IER based Register.
- That the General Election held on 7 May 2015 was the first election to be held on an IER basis. Despite presenting many challenges the various issues were resolved and, in registration terms, the election was a success.
- That the initial work to install the required PSN internet connections has been undertaken and that further work to ensure that these connections are operating at the designed capacity and to fully integrate these with the Board's IT network is ongoing.
- The funding arrangements.

## **3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 The additional costs of the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) are being met by the UK Cabinet Office. The agreed top up level of funding for Tayside Valuation Joint Board for the financial year 2014/15 was £149,724 and the Cabinet Office also agreed to meet the costs of installing the required PSN/DIA connections (£15,155), the rental cost of the connections during the financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 (£34,128 per annum) and the costs of required network changes (£89,127).

- 3.2 The indicative level of top up funding for the year 2015/16 is £84,248. This level of funding is conditional upon funding allocations provided by the constituent authorities being maintained at existing levels.
- 3.3 The Cabinet Office has been unable to confirm whether additional funding will be provided to meet the ongoing costs of Individual Electoral Registration beyond the financial year 2015/16. It is understood that a decision will be taken on this issue as part of the UK Government's Spending Review which will take place during the coming months.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environment Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Equality Impact Assessment. There are no major issues.

#### **5 THE INTRODUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

- 5.1 Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was introduced in Scotland immediately after the Scottish Independence Referendum which took place on 18 September 2014. The effect of that change was that any registration applications received by the Electoral Registration Officer on or before 17 September 2014 were dealt with under the old procedure of household registration whilst any registration applications received by the Electoral Registration Officer on or after the 18 of September 2014 are subject to the new IER processes.
- 5.2 In order to make the transition to the new IER process as straightforward as possible, the UK Government put special transition arrangements in place for existing electors who were previously entered on the Register. These measures include a pre-confirmation match of the existing Electoral Register to DWP and other sources of data.
- 5.3 In the Angus Council area 82,936 electors were matched to the DWP database and in the Perth & Kinross Council area 104,891 electors were successfully matched. These electors were automatically "pass-ported" into the new IER based Electoral Register and each received an individual confirmation letter advising them that they did not need to take any further action.
- 5.4 Electors who were not successfully matched were asked to complete a new Invitation to Register (ITR) application form to provide the necessary details, including their date of birth and National Insurance Number. In the Angus Council area 13,772 ITRs were issued. In the Perth and Kinross area 21,458 ITRs were issued. On receipt of completed applications these details were submitted for confirmation to the DWP and/or other data sources before the elector was added to the IER based Register.
- 5.5 In addition to the above, Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were issued to all households where there were no or incomplete details of the electors who may be resident in the property. 18,341 HEFs were issued to households in the Angus Council area and 23,837 HEFs were issued in the Perth and Kinross Council area.
- 5.6 The revised legislation requires that, where a HEF is not returned, two reminders are issued to each property. Where no response is received a doorstep canvass must also be undertaken. Similarly where an ITR is not returned two reminders and a doorstep canvass must be undertaken. In total 12,282 doorstep canvasses were undertaken in the Angus area and 13,706 doorstep canvasses were undertaken in the Perth & Kinross area.

- 5.7 A key feature of the new IER process is that electors are able to register on-line. A dedicated Government website has been created for this purpose and this can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>. The UK Government, the Electoral Commission and the ERO have directed electors to this website wherever possible and this has been very successful with over 70% of all applications across the UK being made on-line. However, if required electors can return their details to the ERO on paper forms or by telephone.
- 5.8 The introduction of IER was undertaken by 27 February 2015 and the first IER based Electoral Register was successfully published on that date.
- 5.9 Following publication of the Register on 27 February 2015 a “Household Notification Letter” was issued to households identifying all electors included in Register at that address and inviting any residents who were not included to contact the ERO or to make an application. There was a considerable response to these letters and, whilst this did generate an enormous number of telephone calls, enquiries and new registrations, it had a very positive effect on the accuracy of the Electoral Register.

## **6 THE RE-NAMING OF THE FULL ELECTORAL REGISTER & THE EDITED REGISTER**

- 6.1 As part of the introduction of IER the UK Government took the opportunity to re-name both the “Full” Electoral Register and the “Edited” Electoral Register. From 19 September 2014 onwards the Full Register is known simply as the “Electoral Register” and the Edited Register is known as the “Open Register”.
- 6.2 The re-naming of the two Registers was accompanied by revised wording which is designed to make the distinction between the two Registers more clear and to assist electors to make an informed choice as to whether they wish to be included in the Open Register or not. This revised wording was included in the majority of letters and forms that are to be issued for IER purposes.
- 6.3 It is apparent that the revised name and wording was extremely successful in alerting electors to the differences between the two registers and this resulted in an extremely high volume of telephone calls and emails from electors who wish to be removed from the Open Register.

## **7 THE UK PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION: 7 MAY 2015**

- 7.1 The writ giving notice that the UK Parliamentary General Election would take place on 7 May 2015 was formally issued on 31 March 2015, although the date of the election was widely known before that time.
- 7.2 In preparation for the election numerous planning and preparatory meetings were attended with the election teams of both Angus and Perth & Kinross Councils. As the UK Parliamentary boundaries do not align with Local Government boundaries, joint meetings were also attended with Dundee City Council (in respect of the Dundee East and Dundee West constituencies) and Clackmannanshire Council (in respect of the Ochil and South Perthshire constituency). Representatives of Police Scotland also attended meetings where appropriate.
- 7.3 Arrangements were made covering all necessary elements of the election process relating to electoral registration, including the arrangements for the registration of new electors, postal voters and proxy voters and the issue of poll cards, postal votes, proxy votes, the printing of polling registers and all related data file transfers. The relevant risks were assessed and, where appropriate, contingency arrangements were put in place.

- 7.4 During the period between publication of the Register on 27 February 2015 and the date of the election 7,798 electors were added to the Registers, 215,420 poll cards were issued, 5,947 successful postal vote applications and 986 successful proxy votes applications were received and processed.
- 7.5 This election was the first to be undertaken on the basis of the new system of Individual Electoral Registration. It is clear that, notwithstanding the provision of an on-line registration facility, the new procedures are very complex, labour intensive and generate significantly higher levels of outgoing mail than the previous system with attendant printing and postage demands. These issues presented a considerable number of challenges in the run up to the election; particularly for electoral registration staff and IT staff, but also for the Board's IT suppliers, print and postage suppliers and the election teams of the constituent authorities. I am very grateful to them all for their hard work, diligence and dedication to the task which ensured that, in electoral registration terms, the election was a success.
- 7.6 The UK Cabinet Office will now undertake a review of the procedures employed for the new system of Individual Registration to ascertain whether any steps can be taken to streamline the process.

## **8 SECURE INTERNET (PSN) CONNECTIONS**

- 8.1 The initial matching of existing electors to the DWP database was undertaken using secure Public Sector Network (PSN) internet connections provided by the UK Cabinet Office. Thereafter these connections are required daily to upload new registration applications for matching to the DWP database and to download both the matched data and new registration applications made through the on-line service. Whilst initial work has been undertaken to install these connections, and these have proved adequate for the initial introduction of IER, considerable challenges remain to ensure that these connections are operating at the designed capacity and to fully integrate these with the Board's IT network. This work is still ongoing.

## **9 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 9.1 Details of the additional funding agreed with the Cabinet Office in respect of the costs of transition to Individual Electoral Registration during the financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 are shown below.

• Allocated top up funding for the financial year 2014/15, Additional hardware funding & Maximising Registration funding	£149,724
• Cost of installing PSN connections	£15,155
• Cost of IT upgrades & network changes	£89,127
• PSN/DIA Line rental (per annum)	£34,128
• Indicative top up funding for the financial year 2015/16 & Maximising Registration funding	£84,248

- 8.2 The Cabinet Office has been unable to confirm, as yet, whether additional funding will be provided to meet the ongoing costs of Individual Electoral Registration beyond the financial year 2015/16. It is understood that a decision will be taken on this issue as part of the UK Government's Spending Review which will take place during the coming months.

**9 CONSULTATION**

9.1 The Clerk and Treasurer to the Board have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**10 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 None.

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**June 2015**