

REPORT TO: TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD – 19 NOVEMBER 2012

REPORT ON: ELECTORAL REGISTRATION CANVASS PROCEDURES

REPORT BY: ASSESSOR

REPORT NO: TVJB 21-2012

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to appraise the Board of the procedures adopted in the 2012 canvass of electors in order to meet the performance standards set by the Electoral Commission.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Board is asked to note the content of the report and the actions taken in relation to the canvass of electors.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The costs associated with the annual canvass will be contained within the approved 2012/13 revenue budget.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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

5 BACKGROUND

5.1 At its meeting on 27 August 2012 the Board noted the performance assessed by the Electoral Commission in relation to the electoral registration service carried out during 2011 for Angus Council and Perth & Kinross Council, as set out in the appendix to this report.

5.2 The Board noted that the Electoral Commission had determined that the standard in relation to house to house inquiries had not been met in 2011. The Assessor reported that the recommendations of the Electoral Commission had been taken into account in planning the 2012 annual canvass. The Assessor was asked to report further on this matter at the November meeting of the Board.

5.3 In connection with his duties to maintain the Register of Electors, the Electoral Registration Officer carries out an annual canvass of electors from September to November. A new register is published on or shortly before 1 December each year. Outwith the canvass period the register is updated monthly from January to August.

5.4 The annual canvass of electors involves issuing a registration form to all households at the end of August. A reminder is sent to all non-responding households in October.

- 5.5 Canvassers are employed to visit non-responding households from mid-October to mid-November. Visits are arranged having regard to practicality and the best use of resources. Generally these have concentrated on areas within towns and burghs where there has been a high level of non-responding households. The Electoral Registration Officer has considered it impractical and uneconomical to send canvassers to remote rural areas.
- 5.6 The Electoral Registration Officer is authorised to inspect records held by others to enable him to verify the information held on his own records. Council Tax records have been obtained to assist in the verification process.
- 5.7 The names of non-responding electors are not automatically removed from the register. They are retained when details can be verified from other sources and will only be removed if no response has been obtained after 2 years and details cannot be verified from another source. A letter is sent to every elector whose name is removed on this basis in order to give them an opportunity to re-register should they still be resident at the address.
- 5.8 The Electoral Commission carried out an audit of the registration procedures adopted for Angus Council and Perth & Kinross Council in 2010 and 2011. This included visits to inspect records and to discuss procedures with the Electoral Registration Officer. On both occasions the Commission's representatives were advised that, for reasons of cost and practicality, personal visits would not be carried out in remote rural areas and that it may not always be possible to verify the information held in every case. Feedback provided by the Commission following these audits did not indicate that the procedures adopted would result in failure to meet the performance standard. The Electoral Commission accepted that the standard was met for 2010. The number of properties visited by canvassers in 2011 was increased by 2,231 visits.
- 5.9 In order to determine whether the standards have been met, the Electoral Commission require all Electoral Registration Officers to complete and return annually a self assessment questionnaire. Following submission of the 2011 details, some Electoral Registration Officers were asked to provide supplementary information. The information provided in respect of Angus and Perth & Kinross Councils resulted in the Commission determining that the standard in respect of the house to house inquiries had not been met.
- 5.10 Electoral Registration legislation requires the Electoral Registration Officer to take all steps that are necessary for the purpose of complying with his duty to maintain the register. Such steps are specified as including sending inquiry forms; making house to house inquiries; making contact by such other means as the registration officer thinks appropriate; inspecting records held by any person which he is permitted to inspect; and providing training to staff.
- 5.11 In relation to house to house inquiries the legislation provides that in connection with a canvass of electors the registration officer may, for the purpose of obtaining or supplementing information requested on the canvas forms, "*make such house to house inquiries as he thinks fit*". In the Electoral Registration Officer's opinion, this provides a degree of discretion that allows him to choose not to make personal visits to houses in remote areas, having regard to the cost and practicality of making such visits.

- 5.12 The Electoral Commission's position is that in order to meet the standard set for house to house inquiries the Electoral Registration Officer must have a comprehensive written plan ensuring that properties which have not responded to the annual canvass, and where the Electoral Registration Officer is not otherwise satisfied that eligible electors are resident, are subject to house to house inquiries on at least one occasion. Electoral Registration Officers in Scotland have discussed this matter with representatives of the Electoral Commission who have advised that, in their view, such inquiries should be made in every case, without regard to cost and practicality.

6 PROCEDURES ADOPTED FOR THE 2012 CANVASS

- 6.1 A comprehensive review of canvass procedures has been undertaken in planning the 2012 annual canvass of electors, having regard to the recommendation of the Electoral Commission.
- 6.2 As required by legislation, forms have been sent to all households and reminders have been issued to those who have not responded.

	Initial Forms Issued	Reminder Forms Issued
Angus	55,004	21,168
Perth & Kinross	70,367	27,552

- 6.3 Information from Council Tax records has been obtained from Angus Council and Perth & Kinross Council to assist in the process of verifying electors. Records have been obtained in electronic format and have been compared against electoral registration records by means of a computer program developed specifically for this purpose. This has enabled a matching process to be carried out more effectively than in previous years and based on more up to date records. It has also helped to reduce the number of houses requiring a personal visit.
- 6.4 A team of 25 temporary canvassers has been engaged to visit households which have failed to return forms and where records cannot be confirmed from other sources. The enhanced data matching procedures adopted for the 2012 canvass has resulted in it being possible to extend the canvass areas to include the smaller villages and their surrounding areas. The number of properties to be visited is:-

Angus: 6,089
Perth & Kinross: 8,402

- 6.5 It is still considered impractical to send canvassers to remote rural areas. Attempts will be made to contact households in such areas by telephone or email. The number of non-responding households in these areas amount to:-

Angus: 85
Perth & Kinross: 478

In the event that contact cannot be made by telephone or email, visits will be made by permanent staff when engaged in other business in the area.

- 6.6 It has to be emphasised that non-responding electors will not be automatically removed from the register. If necessary, inquiries will continue beyond the publication of the revised register on 30 November 2012 and the register will be updated as appropriate.
- 6.7 The Electoral Registration Officer is of the view that the procedures adopted for the 2012 canvass will meet the standard set by the Electoral Commission.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Clerk and the Treasurer to the Board have been consulted on this report.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None.

John M Galbraith FRICS
Assessor

November 2012

SUMMARY OF ELECTORAL REGISTRATION PERFORMANCE 2011 Angus Council and Perth & Kinross Council

Performance Standards set and assessed by the Electoral Commission

Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records	
Performance standard 1: Information sources	Above the standard
Performance standard 2: Property database	Above the standard
Performance standard 3: House-to-house inquiries	Not currently meeting the standard
Integrity	
Performance standard 4: Integrity	Above the standard
Performance standard 5: Supply and security	Above the standard
Participation	
Performance standard 6: Public awareness	Meets the standard
Performance standard 7: Working with partners	Meets the standard
Performance standard 8: Accessibility and communication	Meets the standard
Planning and organisation	
Performance standard 9: Planning	Meets the standard
Performance standard 10: Training	Meets the standard

Full details are available on the Electoral Commission website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.