

REPORT TO: TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD – 17 NOVEMBER 2014

REPORT ON: ELECTORAL REGISTRATION –
SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

REPORT BY: ASSESSOR

REPORT NO: TVJB 26-2014

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to update members on recent electoral registration issues relating to the Scottish Independence Referendum.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board:

- Note the increased workloads which arose from the Scottish Independence Referendum.
- Note that a de-briefing of the processes and procedures employed is being undertaken to ensure that all lessons that may be learned are taken on board.
- Note that representations will be made to the Electoral Management Board and the Electoral Commission regarding issues that arose with regard to the electoral cut off dates and publicity material.
- Note that additional costs amounting to £24,469 have been incurred and that approaches are being made to the Scottish Government to ascertain whether these costs will be reimbursed.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Scottish Government previously indicated that it would meet the costs of the Scottish Independence Referendum and funding of £5,992 has been provided for this purpose. Costs incurred in printing and posting poll cards will be met separately by the Counting Officers and will subsequently be re-charged to the Scottish Government. However, additional electoral registration costs amounting to £24,469 were incurred over and above these amounts and approaches are currently being made to the Scottish Government to ascertain whether these costs will be reimbursed.

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 SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

- 5.1 The Referendum on Scottish Independence, which took place on 18 September 2014, was introduced following the signing of the Edinburgh Agreement by the UK Government and the Scottish Government. The particular provisions were contained within the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Act 2013 and the Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013.

- 5.2 A specific departure to the normal voting franchise introduced by the Scottish Independence (Franchise) Act was that, for the first time, young persons aged 16 and 17 were entitled to vote at the Referendum. This change required a specific Young Person's Register to be created and, in order to achieve this, additional Young Person's canvass forms, together with reminder forms were distributed to all

households. Liaison with Local Authority Education Departments and Social Work Departments took place along with engagement with Young Person's organisations such as the Youth Council and "Bite the Ballot". In addition liaison also took place with established groups such as University Student Groups and Ethnic Minority Groups. Overall this engagement was considered to be a success and it is estimated that approximately 90% of all eligible young persons were entered on the Electoral Register.

- 5.3 The issues raised by the Referendum caught the attention of a wide spectrum of the press and public and this was reflected in increased registration rates throughout the period of the European Election, which took place on 22 May 2014, and indeed across the summer period. These issues came sharply into focus in the weeks running up to the Referendum itself and particularly in the period from 18 August onwards when the Electoral Commission advertising campaign started.
- 5.4 The increased public interest can be seen from the following statistics:

Increase in number of electors:	Angus	Perth & Kinross
10 March 2014 – 1 June 2014	275	369
2 June 2014 – 18 August 2014	1,319	2,160
18 August 2014 – 11 September 2014	<u>1,941</u>	<u>2,495</u>
Total	3,535	5,024

Increase in number of Absent Voters:	Angus	Perth & Kinross
10 March 2014 – 1 June 2014	621	1,768
2 June 2014 – 18 August 2014	1,713	5,549
18 August 2014 – 11 September 2014	<u>2,998</u>	<u>4,370</u>
Total	5,332	11,687

Overall the registered electorate in Angus Council area increased from 90,074 to 93,656 and the registered electorate in the Perth & Kinross Council Area increased from 115,068 to 120,052.

There are no details available to record the number of telephone calls and emails that were received and responded to over this period.

- 5.5 It is apparent that, notwithstanding the preparations that had been made, the Electoral Registration Offices in Perth and in Forfar were both overwhelmed by the volume of telephone calls, emails, registration applications, requests for new, altered or cancelled postal vote applications, and emergency proxy vote applications that were received. In particular the volumes of registration applications and postal/proxy vote applications received immediately before the respective cut off dates posed significant logistical problems.
- 5.6 In order to meet this vastly increased workload, all Board staff in Angus and in Perth, together with Headquarters and IT staff, were fully engaged in responding to telephone calls, receiving members of the public, processing application forms and issuing the required registration and postal vote papers, notices, etc. Exceedingly long periods of overtime work were required, particularly by the electoral staff, and in some cases this required staff to work all through the night. These elements peaked at "crunch" periods when staff manned the office from 8.00am till 12.00 midnight at the Registration Cut off date of 2 September and again on 3 September when the electoral staff worked from 8.00am till 5.00am the following day to ensure that all postal and proxy vote applications were appropriately dealt with. Electoral staff were on hand again on Referendum day to deal with issues which arose from 7.00am until after midnight.

5.7 A number of practical and procedural issues were highlighted during the Referendum process, and these include the adequacy of IT, email and telephone systems and the staffing levels required to deal with such a high level of demand. A full debriefing of the processes and procedures is currently being undertaken to ensure that all lessons that may be learned are fully taken on board and, where appropriate, reported to the Electoral Management Board and the Electoral Commission. However, it is clear that the major difficulties encountered were caused, in large part, by the lateness of the Registration Cut off date (-12 days) and the Postal Vote cut off date (-11 days) before the Referendum date. Additional difficulties were encountered as a result of publicity material which failed to clarify that voters who had received a poll card were already on the Electoral Register and did not require to contact the Registration Office.

5.8 The costs associated with the Referendum can be broken down as follows:

Costs to issue initial Young Person's canvass forms: (Previously met by the Scottish Government)	£ 5,992
Additional Costs:	
Cost of overtime	£16,386
Cost of additional printing and postage	<u>£ 8,083</u>
	Total £24,469

Approaches are being made to the Scottish Government to ascertain whether these additional costs will be reimbursed.

5.9 It is testament to the dedication and commitment of the staff involved that all necessary procedures were complied with and that no serious failures arose. As Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to all those staff involved. I would also like to record my thanks to the Counting Officers and Election Teams of both Angus and Perth & Kinross Councils for all their hard work and assistance during this difficult period.

6 CONSULTATION

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

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

**Alastair Kirkwood
Assessor**

November 2014