

**REPORT TO: TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD – 28 AUGUST 2023**

**REPORT ON: ELECTORAL REGISTRATION – ELECTIONS ACT**

**REPORT BY: ASSESSOR**

**REPORT NO: TVJB 21-2023**

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report seeks to update the Joint Board on additional duties requiring to be carried out by the Electoral Registration Officer following introduction of the Elections Act 2022.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Joint Board note that:

- The Elections Act brought in a requirement for voters to show an approved form of identification at certain polls and in Scotland came into force from 4 May 2023 onwards for recall petitions and UK Parliamentary by-elections. Voter identification will apply in UK Parliamentary General Elections from 5 October onwards. Where an elector does not have an approved identity document (passport, driving license etc), they may apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).
- The VAC service for electors went live on 16 January 2023. On that date the ERO Portal, a service provided by the UK Government, began accepting applications. Applications are accessed by our staff who determine and process them. At the date of writing this report we have received 66 applications (34 for Angus area and 32 for Perth and Kinross).
- The Electoral Commission intends to roll out a public awareness campaign in relation to the above change in Scotland ahead of a UK Parliament General Election. Meantime the Commission has designed a leaflet suitable for use in Scotland informing electors of the need to show photo ID to vote in person at the above elections and to apply for a VAC if required. Locally, the leaflet has recently been issued with all paper annual canvass communications and reference to voter ID/VACs also included in canvass e-communications.
- On 6 July, the statutory instrument to implement changes to postal and proxy voting and introduce an online application service for these voting methods was laid before Parliament. These changes are currently scheduled to come into effect in October this year.
- Postal Voting change. For UK Parliamentary General Elections and recall petitions, postal vote signature refresh arrangements will be limited to a maximum of 3 years, following which the elector will need to make a fresh application. This will apply to any postal vote applications made after 31 October 2023. Transitional arrangements will be in place – any postal voters with an existing arrangement in place prior to 31 October 2023 will not need to reapply until 31 January 2026. The existing 5 year refresh period for Scottish elections will continue to apply.
- Proxy Voting change. For UK Parliamentary General Elections and recall petitions, the total number of electors for whom a person may act as a proxy for will be limited to four, of which no more than two can be for 'domestic electors' – i.e. an elector that is neither an overseas elector nor a service voter. This will apply to any proxy vote appointments made after 31 October 2023.

Transitional arrangements will be in place – any proxy voters with an existing arrangement in place prior to 31 October 2023 will need to reapply for their proxy vote by 31 January 2024.

- Online Absent Vote Applications. A new online service will be introduced to allow electors to apply for a postal or proxy vote online. This service, hosted on GOV.UK will be a new feature within the ERO Portal, and will be in addition to the current application process, with paper applications continuing to be available. Identity checking will be introduced for all absent vote applications other than those for emergency proxies. The online service and the identity verification requirements will apply to UK Parliamentary General Elections and recall petitions only.
- The online service and associated changes to existing Electoral Management Software systems are currently being tested/further developed and staff training in their use will be rolled out in due course, with new processes being implemented accordingly. Members should however be aware of the potential for elector confusion and administrative complexity due to the divergence that will exist between Scotland and the rest of the UK as a result of the above changes. Clear communications will be required to ensure voters are aware of the different arrangements for different polls.
- A further change relates to removal of the 15 year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas, currently scheduled to come into force in January 2024. Overseas electors will be able to register at a UK address where they were previously registered, or if never registered, at the UK address where they were last resident. The registration period will be extended from one year up to three years. This change applies to the right to vote in UK Parliamentary elections only.
- In order to cope with the increased workload which will be generated as a result of the above changes, the Electoral Registration Officer intends to put in place additional capacity by upskilling five existing members of clerical staff to enable them to contribute to electoral registration work as required.

### **3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The UK Government has agreed to provide funding to reflect additional staff admin time and training costs involved in processing Voter Authority Certificate, postal and proxy vote applications, and applications from overseas electors. This is also intended to cover communication and engagement costs. Total funding of £22,822 for 2023/24 has been allocated to the electoral registration function in the Angus Council and Perth and Kinross Council areas and this will partially be utilised towards resourcing the upskilling of staff noted above, together with any related IT and licensing costs.

### **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 BACKGROUND**

- 5.1 The UK Government has stated that it has enacted this legislation with the intention of strengthening the integrity of the electoral process by protecting against issues such as electoral fraud and intimidation against candidates, campaigners or elected office holders. Other aims include provision of more support for disabled people at the polling booth and introduction of measures to expand participation in elections.

For full details of the changes to the electoral system introduced by the Act, it can be found at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/37/contents/enacted>.

## **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.

**ROY CHRISTIE**  
**Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer**

**August 2023**