

# ELECTORAL REGISTRATION REPORT 2008/9



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23 March 2009

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work carried out for electoral registration during 2008.

The main tasks are:-

- The canvass
- Rolling Registration
- Elections

The main consideration is the key steps taken at the annual canvass and during the rolling year to ensure a complete and accurate register.

The register is continually updated by way of an annual household canvass which takes place from the end of August to the end of November each year and by way of rolling registration during the rest of the year on an individual basis.

## 2.0 ANNUAL CANVASS

The annual register for 2008 was published on 27<sup>th</sup> November. The registers were distributed to all relevant persons and organisations. The entire canvass was concluded on time with full checks and audits being carried out ensuring accuracy of the information supplied and applied to the register.

To maximise registration extensive contact was made with households in Lothian and several advertising initiatives were put in place.

### 2.1 Canvass Household Contact

343,235 registration forms were passed to Royal Mail on 18<sup>th</sup> August for delivery to all households in Lothian. The percentage return rate from the first issue was 62.12%.

A door to door canvass was carried out on 38,121 households with a percentage return rate from the canvassers of 55%.

144,796 reminder registration forms were passed to Royal Mail on 3<sup>rd</sup> October for delivery to all households in Lothian where a canvass form had not been returned. The percentage return rate from the second issue was 9.3%.

109,220 final reminder registration forms were passed to Royal Mail on 31<sup>st</sup> October for delivery to all households in Lothian where a canvass form had not been returned from the two previous issues. The percentage return rate from the third issue was 6.6%.

## **2.2 Performance Achieved**

The overall return from the electorate, received prior to the publication of the register, was 78%. In addition secondary checks against Council Tax payers' records, confirmed 9% of households where no return had been received were still in occupation, and these were carried forward from the previous register in compliance with the legislation. The full return or retention from households could therefore be presented as 87%.

## **2.3 Door to Door Canvass**

It was established that approx 40,000 houses would be included in the door to door canvass and that a range of areas would be chosen. In order to be able to gauge the effectiveness of this approach a range of localities based on the following criteria were considered.

- the canvass return rate recorded during the 2007 canvass,
- the physical characteristics of the locality,
- the ease or otherwise with which door to door canvass could be conducted and
- the health and safety of the canvassers.

The outcome of deliberations was to provide a range of areas across the Board's authority showing varying levels of canvass return during 2007 with a mixture of physical characteristics.

## **2.4 Canvasser Recruitment and Training**

While previous attempts to recruit canvassers had been disappointing, for 2008 efforts were concentrated on approaching existing council staff within each of the Board's constituent authorities.

Following advertising and interview, 66 canvassers were employed. Training on the necessary electoral legislation and conducting at the door canvass was provided to each canvasser, along with essential information on personal health and safety matters. Every canvasser was provided with the necessary equipment including waterproof jackets and personal alarms.

## **2.5 Canvasser Management**

The door to door canvass was controlled by the senior administration managers within the organisation. Each canvasser was given approximately 500 household addresses that required canvassing and deadlines by which this should be completed. Their progress towards completion was monitored and their returns subject to internal audit check.

The canvass was mostly conducted either in the evening or at weekends, as during the day canvass has repeatedly proven of limited worth. All door to door canvasses were completed by the required date and forms returned were duly processed in accordance with existing procedures.

## **2.6 Door to Door Canvass Performance**

Out of 33,121 household canvassed via the door to door approach, 21,143 forms were completed on the doorstep, and in all cases, every area canvassed in this manner, has shown an increase in the overall canvass return rate for 2008, over 2007.

The number of households being canvassed in each area varied considerably and this clearly had an impact on the success rates, in addition the physical characteristics of the area, i.e. tenement, mixed use, villas, etc also had an impact. However notwithstanding this the level of increase of canvass return ranged from 2.3% to 21.4%, with the average being 8%.

## **2.7 Door to Door Canvass Financial Considerations**

For 2008 £37,925 was spent on canvasser payments. Additional sums were spent on canvass materials, expenses and incidentals. Excluding costs for printing and stationary associated with the production of the canvass form itself, the total cost of the canvass was approximately £42,000.

Each door to door canvass therefore cost something in the region of £1.40 to undertake. This should be set against the equivalent postal canvass cost of 40p for a return at Stage 1. It is generally accepted that the cost of door to door canvass is more expensive than an all postal approach.

## **2.8 Additional Tasks carried out for Completeness**

Properties where no annual canvass form was returned were checked against the council tax payment list and where an existing elector is also on the council tax list the elector is retained on the register.

## **4.0 MAXIMISING REGISTRATION**

### **4.1 Assisting the Electorate**

To assist the electorate in completion of the form a pre-paid addressed envelope is included to limit time required to return the form and to ensure no cost involved in purchasing envelopes

and stamps. The annual electoral canvass form is pre-printed to minimise the time and effort required to complete and return.

#### **4.2 Advertising During the Canvass**

To raise awareness of the annual canvass and to encourage the electorate to return the form various initiatives were continued from the previous year.

- A newspaper article appeared in a variety of local newspapers at the end of August/beginning of September to coincide with the start of the canvass and encourage return of the canvass form.
- A radio advert was placed on Radio Ramadan which transmitted daily from the 3<sup>rd</sup> September to 4<sup>th</sup> October to encourage registration within this ethnic group.
- An advert was placed on Radio Ramadan website with the intention of raising awareness of registration.
- Staff organised and attended events at the Gyle and Ocean Terminal shopping centres aimed at encouraging electoral participation and the return of the canvass forms.
- Adverts were placed on internal panels of Lothian buses during the month of September bringing the need for registration to the attention of the electorate.
- A further newspaper article appeared in all local newspapers at the beginning of October to coincide with the issue of the first reminder.
- Senior staff attended information days at Glencorse Barracks and Craigiehall HQ with a view to encouraging registration from service personnel.
- Staff visited care homes offering advice and assistance in the completion of forms.
- Contact was made with universities and colleges that enabled students within halls of residence to be registered through a bulk return.
- Advertising material was provided to Councillors, Libraries and Local Authority buildings for displaying in prominent places during the canvass.

#### **4.3 Additional Initiatives Identified from Review of 2007 Canvass Procedures**

Following the 2007 canvass senior electoral staff attended a canvass review event to consider and identify improvements in communicating with the electorate and identifying ways to improve the accuracy and completeness of the register.

Suggested improvements carried out consisted of:-

- Door to door audits out with the canvass period.
- Advertising timed to correspond with key events.
- New information stand purchased which is easier to transport and set up in a greater variety of venues.
- Contact with ethnic groups via the Edinburgh Mela.
- Contact with schools in West Lothian
- Attended Neighbourhood Community meetings.
- Attended University student registration events.

## **5.0 ROLLING REGISTRATION**

Throughout the rest of the year the register was continually updated via Rolling Registration. Records are updated monthly to take account of:-

- Information received from local registrars.
- Information received from our technical staff for new houses, new care homes and demolished properties.
- Information received from the constituent councils for new council taxpayers.

During the year prior to the canvass my staff added 13,912 new electors to the register this is down from 17,768 added in the previous year. The number deleted was 13,276 and amended 2,502 which are similar to the previous year.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2009**

Given the level of success as defined by canvass return rates seen during the 2008 canvass it has been agreed to incorporate further door to door activities during the 2009 annual canvass.

Further detailed analysis of the 2008 results are underway that shall help form the approach in terms of numbers of households and localities to be canvassed. A similar level of funding shall be made available during 2009.

## **7.0 ELECTIONS**

The Forth by-election on 6<sup>th</sup> November took place with no issues arising.

## **8.0 ABSENT VOTE PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS**

The collection of Absent Vote Personal Identifiers from electors commenced in February 2008 and has continued to the present day. The European Parliamentary Elections on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009 will be the first in Lothian at which Personal Identifiers will be checked. Contact has been made with the various software suppliers engaged by the Lothian Councils and test data will be supplied to ensure any issues are addressed prior to the elections. The current standing list of Absent Voters eligible to vote at the European Elections is 76,000 at the present time.

## **9.0 ELECTORAL COMMISSION**

The Electoral Commission carried out a consultation on performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain. The consultation commenced with a report requesting responses by interested parties by the Spring of 2008. The follow up step was a pilot exercise to

assess the practicalities of completing the proposed performance standards documentation in which Lothian participated.

The first submission by all EROs was made in January. Lothian was included in a random group of EROs selected for a verification audit which took place in February. The Board was provided with an indicative copy of the submission made to the Commission at the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> February. The report should be published in late Spring 2009.

#### **10.0 PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

To ensure all legal requirements, performance standards and customer satisfaction are met joint meetings are held with various professional groups. The Joint Board is represented at the following meetings:-

- Interim Elections Management Board
- Scottish Assessors Association Electoral Registration Committee
- Association of Electoral Administrators
- Edinburgh Elections Consultative Group
- Edinburgh Elections Core Group
- Lothian and Borders Elections Working Group.

#### **11.0 RECOMMENDATION**

The Board is recommended to note the content of this report and in particular the commitment by the Electoral Registration Officer and staff in ensuring the accuracy of the Electoral Register and the efforts taken to maximize registration.



**ASSESSOR & ERO**

**23 March 2008**