

# Report

Report to:	<b>Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>6 June 2011</b>
Report by:	<b>Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer</b>

Subject:	<b>Electoral Commission Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers - Scottish Comparison</b>
----------	---

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Advise members of performance of the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for Lanarkshire as measured by Electoral Commission Performance Standards and by comparison to other Scottish EROs

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Board is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the contents of the report be noted

## 3. Background

3.1. At the Joint Board's meeting of 7 March 2011, I reported on the performance of Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board (LVJB) as measured against Electoral Commission Performance Standards. I undertook to provide members with an update comparing performance with the rest of Scotland. In April 2011, the Electoral Commission published a report on performance standards which now allows me to provide members with the relevant information.

The Commission also collects information on the comparative cost of providing the Electoral Registration service and General Registers of Scotland provide population estimates to allow comparison of registration levels. These figures have added to the performance standards information to provide context to the performance figures.

## 4. Electoral Commission summary of Scottish performance in Electoral Registration

### 4.1. General Background (extract from EC report)

"Scottish Councils may appoint either one of their officers, an officer of an adjoining Council, or an officer appointed by a combination of Councils to act as the ERO for the authority. Currently, 10 EROs are appointed by groups of two, three or four councils, representing 27 of the 32 Scottish Councils. The remaining five Councils have appointed one of their own officers to act solely for their own area.

As the same practices and procedures are used in every area where the ERO is appointed by a combination of Councils, an assessment was made for each ERO rather than for each council area, meaning that there are 15 separate assessments rather than 32. To ensure comparability of performance between EROs in Scotland and those elsewhere in Great Britain, our analysis refers to the number of EROs appointed by the 32 Scottish councils, and we have indicated, where relevant, if an individual officer is appointed by more than one Council.

As is the case across Great Britain as a whole, there are some variations in performance by EROs in Scotland between the 10 standards:

- For the first time, EROs for all 32 Scottish council areas met or exceeded all 10 of the standards.
- The majority of EROs exceeded four out of the 10 standards, with performance being very strong in the first subject area, 'Completeness and accuracy', with nearly all officers reporting performance above Standard 1: 'Information sources', and Standard 2: 'Property database'.
- All EROs in Scotland met Standard 6: 'Public awareness' and Standard 8: 'Accessibility', but none reported that they exceeded the standards. For Standard 6, this was an improvement on 2009, when EROs for 10 out of the 32 councils were below the standard.

#### **4.2 Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registration Records**

EROs in Scotland performed very strongly in relation to the three standards which concern the 'Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records' (Standards 1-3). All EROs were at least meeting the standards in the subject area. EROs for 28 of the 32 Scottish council areas (87.5%) reported being above Standard 1.

All but two EROs in Scotland exceeded Standard 2: 'Property database'. In the majority of cases, the people appointed as EROs in Scotland are also the Assessors. The Assessor is responsible for the valuation of domestic and non-domestic properties for the purposes of council tax and non-domestic rates. Both functions require the ERO/Assessor to maintain an accurate and up-to-date property database. Additional sources of information such as the Registers of Scotland are also regularly used by a number of EROs.

EROs for half of the Scottish Council areas (16 out of 32) met Standard 3. The remaining 16 exceeded the standard.

Since the publication of our registration research in March 2010, we have met with the ERO for Glasgow three times to discuss their registration activities in much greater detail. Consequently we made 12 recommendations of ways in which they could improve the completeness and accuracy of the register. Since then, the ERO has worked with one of the Council's service delivery managers to create a strategic improvement plan based on those recommendations and the performance standards framework. We have recently met with the ERO again to discuss the improvement plan and we will continue to monitor their progress towards the plan's objectives.

No EROs in Scotland were below Standard 4: 'Integrity', an improvement on last year when EROs for five Scottish Council areas did not meet the standard. EROs for two-thirds of Scottish council areas (20) met Standard 4: 'Integrity', with the remainder (12) exceeding it. EROs for six areas exceeded Standard 4 in 2009 and five in 2008. Although there have been very few cases of electoral malpractice in Scotland, we found that EROs have codified their working practices and have set up triggers for when staff should pass an application on to their supervisor for further investigation.

#### **4.3 Integrity**

Nearly all EROs (covering 29 Councils) in Scotland exceeded Standard 5: 'Supply and security', with the remaining EROs, who act for three Councils (9%) meeting the standard.

#### **4.4 Participation**

All EROs in Scotland met Standard 6: 'Public awareness', with no officers reporting performance above the standard. This is an improvement on the five EROs (acting for 10 Councils) who were below the standard last year. Through our verification, we found that EROs are improving their strategic planning for promoting public awareness, but finding ways to evaluate these initiatives has been challenging.

We found that the improvements are due to EROs better identifying their target audiences and individuals or groups who can help promote public awareness (either Council staff who deal with public relations or voluntary organisations who are given EROs time to talk to their members). Some EROs are also branching out into new technology, including setting up Facebook pages or sending a campaign message out on Bluetooth transmitters.

All EROs in Scotland met or exceeded Standard 7: 'Working with partners', an increase of 16% on the previous year. Over half the officers (acting for 18 councils) reported meeting the standard, with the remainder above the standard.

All EROs reported meeting Standard 8: 'Accessibility', with no officers exceeding the standard. This represented an improvement on 2009, when the ERO for two councils reported being below the standard.

#### **4.5 Planning and Organisation**

This was a strong area for EROs in Scotland, with no EROs below either of the two standards for the second year in a row. The vast majority (over 90%) met Standard 9: 'Planning', with the remainder exceeding the standard. The same ERO (appointed by three Scottish Councils) was above the standard in both years. We found that there has been a move to a single comprehensive project plan instead of using different documents.

Three EROs (representing nine Scottish Councils) exceeded Standard 10: 'Training', of which two EROs (representing six Councils) also exceeded the standard last year."

## **5. Analysis of Performance Information**

Appendices 1 to 3 provide a detailed comparison of performance across all areas ordered by performance measures, cost per elector and percentage registration level. Appendix 4 provides further comparison to a peer group of EROs with the highest number of electors.

### **5.1. Comparison Measured by Achievement of Performance Standards**

LVJB performed above 3 of the 10 EC standards and met the other 7. Appendix 1 shows that 8 of 15 EROs in Scotland performed above 4 or more standards, Lanarkshire and 2 others performed above 3 standards while 4 areas performed above 2 or fewer standards. No ERO in Scotland performed below any of the 10 standards. Of the 8 areas reporting better performance than Lanarkshire on this measure, 7 had a higher cost per elector in delivering the service and only one had a lower cost per elector. 7 had a lower registration rate measured against GROS population statistics with only one higher.

### **5.2. Comparison by Cost per Elector of Providing Electoral Registration Service**

Appendix 2 shows performance ordered by cost per elector from lowest to highest. This shows that the reported cost per elector for provision of the electoral registration service in Scotland ranges from £1.56 to £4.26. Lanarkshire has the joint 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest cost at £1.82. Compared to those areas with a lower cost, Lanarkshire has a much larger electorate and a higher registration rate by comparison to GROS population estimates.

### **5.3. Comparison by Registration Rate**

Appendix 3 shows registration rates in Scotland ordered from highest to lowest. This shows that, by comparison to GROS population estimates, registration rates in Scotland range from 85.69% to 98.43% with Lanarkshire achieving 96.14% by this measure. Of those areas with a higher registration rate, all have a significantly lower electorate. Three of the four report a lower performance measured against the EC performance Standards and all but one have a higher cost per elector for service delivery, the other being similar.

### **5.4 Comparison to Peer Group of Areas with Largest electorate**

Appendix 4 shows comparison of performance of the 4 areas with the highest electorates ordered by size of electorate. This shows that, although all 3 of the other areas report higher performance measured against the EC performance standards, Lanarkshire has the lowest cost per elector and the highest registration rate measured by comparison to GROS population estimates.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

I believe that the above analysis demonstrates good performance by LVJB. The highest 3 performing areas measured by EC performance standards spend between 23% and 72% more per elector in delivering their services than LVJB. This is between £0.42 and £1.33 per elector which is equivalent to an additional cost of between £207,000 and £656,000 per annum if applied to the LVJB budget. LVJB achieves a higher registration level than all 3.

No one achieves the same level of performance across all measures at equivalent cost.

While there is clearly scope for improving performance in some areas, new integrity checks are currently being developed, for example, improvement in other areas will be limited by resources. In particular, the performance standard for door-to-door enquiries could only be improved by employing canvassers outwith the annual canvass period which is not possible within our current budget limitations.

Our strategy will therefore continue to be to focus on improving the completeness and accuracy of the Lanarkshire registers while gradually improving performance where possible in other areas.

## **6. Employee Implications**

6.1 None

## **7 Financial Implications**

7.1 None

## **8. Other Implications**

8.1 As previously reported the current budget strategy of reducing staffing levels puts at risk current performance and limits scope for further improvement.

## **9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

9.1 This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.

## **10. Privacy Impact Assessment**

10.1 The report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.

**Edward P Duffy**  
**Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer**

3 May 2011

## **Previous References**

Report on EC Performance Standards – March 2011

## **List of Background Papers**

EC Report on performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain (Third analysis of performance) April 2011

## **Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Edward P Duffy, Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Phone: 01698 476078

E-mail: [assessor@southlanarkshire.gov.uk](mailto:assessor@southlanarkshire.gov.uk)