

Report to:	<b>Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>7 March 2011</b>
Report by:	<b>Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer</b>

Subject:	<b>Electoral Commission Performance Standards</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Advise members of the performance of the Joint Board measured against the standards set by the Electoral Commission

## 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. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 gave the Electoral Commission a new duty to set and monitor performance of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) in respect of their statutory duties.

To this end, the commission has developed a suite of 10 performance measures against which EROs are required to measure their performance. The measure of performance made by the ERO is subject to verification by the commission. A self assessment has been completed for 2009 by Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board. The Electoral Commission carries out verifications of self assessments. LVJB's self assessment was accepted as accurate by the Commission. This is the second year of the new performance measurement regime and last year's performance is provided for comparison.

Of the 10 performance standards LVJB was assessed as:

Performance measure	2008	2009	2010
Not yet meeting the performance standard	4	2	0
Meeting the performance standard	4	6	7
Above the performance standard	2	2	3

The 10 performance standards are set out under 4 main headings

- 1. Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records**
- 2. Integrity**
- 3. Participation**
- 4. Planning and organisation**

Completeness and accuracy is considered by the Commission as the most important of these performance areas with performance in the others intended to provide support to this key area.

#### **4. The Performance Standards**

##### **4.1. Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records**

This subject area includes the first three performance standards which cover practices used by EROs to ensure that registers are complete and accurate using a variety of information sources and canvassing techniques.

Performance Standard 1 : Using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify potential new electors

This standard aims to ensure EROs use appropriate sources of information to verify records on the register of electors and identify potential new electors		Assessment
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO relies solely on annual canvass returns and rolling registration applications to maintain the register of electors and uses no other sources of information to verify records.	
	2. The ERO uses the records they have the power to inspect to verify entries on the register of electors during the annual canvass period only. The ERO ensures that electors who are reported as having moved or died are removed.	
Performance standard	3. The ERO proactively identifies and uses the records they are entitled to inspect, throughout the year, including during the annual canvass period, to verify and validate data held on the electoral register.	
Above the performance standard	4. The ERO takes a proactive approach throughout the year to identify and contact potential electors who may have moved into, or within, the local authority area, such as by using council tax records to identify residents of newly occupied properties,	LVJB assessed at level 4 (above the performance standard).

The improvement in performance achieved in 2009 has been developed further in 2010. A more proactive approach to registration outwith the canvass period has been adopted and more data matching with other records now takes place. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a requirement to proactively maintain the register on an ongoing basis. The Joint Board's approach historically had been reactive. This is an area which is continuing to be developed with the incorporation of a unique property reference number (UPRN) from the constituent authorities' Corporate Address Gazetteers into the Board's Electoral Registration and Council Tax databases allowing data matching exercises to be carried out more efficiently and with greater confidence in the accuracy of the outcome.

### Performance standard 2 : Maintaining the property database

This standard aims to ensure EROs use all appropriate sources of information available to them to ensure all relevant properties are included in the property database.		
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO takes no steps to maintain an accurate property database.	
	2. The ERO updates the property database on an annual basis only, following the annual canvass.	
Performance standard	3. The ERO maintains a property database on a continuous basis throughout the year, using available records including council tax, planning and building control and the authority's Corporate Address Gazetteer (CAG).	
Above the performance standard	4. The ERO also uses relevant external sources, such as Royal mail and/or Registers of Scotland, and undertakes other activities to update the property database.	LVJB assessed at level 4 (exceeding the performance standard).

Performance in this area was the same as last year. The requirement to maintain a comprehensive property database for Council Tax and Non-domestic rating purposes allows the Joint Board to comfortably exceed the performance standard in this area.

### Performance standard 3 : House-to-house enquiries

This standard aims to ensure that EROs make the necessary house-to-house enquiries to ensure that all eligible residents are registered (section 9A and 10(5) of RPA 1983).		
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO has no plan setting out when to carry out house-to-house enquiries.	
	2. The ERO has a written plan setting out when to carry out house-to-house enquiries but has not met the objectives identified in their plan.	
Performance standard	3. The ERO has a comprehensive written plan ensuring that properties which have not responded to the annual canvass and, where the ERO is not otherwise satisfied that eligible electors are resident, are subject to house-to-house enquiries on at least one or more occasions. Progress against the plan is monitored including actions such as recording contact with residents made by canvass.	LVJB assessed at level 3 (meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	4. The ERO has developed and put in place a specific strategy for carrying out house-to-house enquiries. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identifying when and how house-to-house enquiries should be carried out</li> <li>➤ Considering any needs or difficulties associated with particular areas and preparing accordingly</li> <li>➤ The monitoring of canvasser performance</li> <li>➤ Providing for personal visits to be carried out throughout the year in connection with the identification of eligible residents in conjunction with plans for identifying potential newly eligible residents.</li> </ul>	

Performance in this area is similar to last year. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a new duty to carry out house-to-house enquiries as part of the annual canvass. The targeted approach to this service which was introduced in 2008 to deliver the service within budget was further refined for 2010 and resulted in over 11,500 new electors being picked up by door-to-door canvassers. These are citizens in properties where there otherwise would have been no registered elector.

Canvassers are currently paid car mileage expenses when using their car to carry out house-to-house enquiries. There is a risk associated with the proposed roll out of the Car Pool Scheme that it may be more difficult to recruit canvassers if this option is no longer available. This could affect performance in this area.

### Integrity

This subject area includes two performance standards which cover the processes used by EROs to ensure integrity in the electoral registration and absent vote application process.

#### 4.2.1 Performance standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications

This standard aims to ensure that EROs have a process in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate electoral malpractice		
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO does not carry out any checks to ensure the integrity of registration and absent vote applications.	
	2. The ERO has an informal system in place to check the integrity of registration and absent vote applications but does not document these.	
Performance standard	3. The ERO has a comprehensive written plan outlining what steps are to be taken to deal with concerns about specific registration or absent vote applications. Suspicious registration and absent vote applications that meet the criteria identified in the plan are referred to local police/Single Point of Contact (SPOC), with whom the ERO has appropriate links. The ERO also has in place a threshold number of absent vote applications being directed to any one address. The ERO retains registration forms for the life of the register and original absent vote applications are kept until the application is cancelled, or replaced by a new form.	LVJB assessed at level 3 (meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	4. The ERO has carried out a risk assessment for identifying and dealing with registration and absent vote applications which may be of concern, in particular applications from multi-resident properties, those requesting signature waivers for absent votes, and multiple applications for redirection of absent votes to a single address. The ERO acknowledges all applications for registration on receipt of the application, and not only on grant or refusal of the application.	
	5. The ERO continuously evaluates the risk assessment for identifying and dealing with registration and absent vote	

	<p>applications which may be of concern. The ERO engages with staff in other council services to carry out checks and offers advice to staff of multi-electoral establishments such as landlords, wardens, care staff and other accommodation administrators on the registration and absent voting process. The ERO carries out checks on the signatures and dates of birth that they hold or that they are entitled to inspect such as rolling registration application forms.</p>	
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Performance in this area has improved on last year. The previous lack of a formal document detailing practice in this area and including details of the police SPOC has now been remedied. In practice, many of the requirements of levels 4 & 5 are also part of existing practice and are in the process of further development for inclusion in the current year's formal plan.

#### 4.2.2 Performance standard 5: Supply and security of the register and absent voter lists

This standard aims to ensure that, once published, EROs ensure the full register is made available for public inspection and supply copies of the register and absent voter lists to those prescribed in legislation		
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO has not supplied electoral registration information to those entitled to receive it.	
Performance standard	2. The ERO publishes and supplies the electoral register and absent voter lists to those entitled to receive them. The ERO provides training or guidance to those staff who will be supervising access to the register as well as guidance for recipients of the register as to the correct usage of their copy of the register.	
Above the performance standard	3. The ERO has a recorded complaints procedure in respect of the supply and publication of the electoral register. The ERO maintains a written record of any complaints received and action taken. The ERO records all transactions of sales and supply of the full and edited register and maintains an up to date record of the details of those organisations entitled to receive it.	LVJB assessed at level 3 (exceeding the performance standard).

Performance in this area was the same as last year. The Joint Board's formal complaints procedure and record of transactions relating to the register exceed the performance standard in this area. Although already assessed as performing above the standard in this area, the introduction of a secure transaction database for distribution of registers has enhanced performance in this area.

### 4.3 Participation

This subject area includes three standards which cover the processes used by EROs to encourage participation in the registration process.

#### 4.3.1 Performance standard 6: Public awareness strategy

This standard aims to ensure that EROs develop and maintain an effective and appropriate public awareness strategy.

Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO has no specific public awareness strategy in place.	
	2. The ERO does not maintain a written public awareness strategy, and relies on unstructured management controls such as oral or written updates. Objectives, risks and resources are not formally documented.	
Performance standard	3. The public awareness strategy is documented including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identifying target audiences</li> <li>➤ Clearly defined objectives and success measures</li> <li>➤ Risks – identification and mitigation</li> <li>➤ Resources (financial and staffing)</li> <li>➤ Evaluation plan which records the results of the activities undertaken</li> </ul>	LVJB assessed at level 3 (meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	4. In addition to the above, the public awareness strategy also includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A specific participation budget with a breakdown of how this will be used</li> <li>➤ Assessments of the needs of those different audiences and the most effective methods of reaching them</li> <li>➤ Plans for different activities at different parts of the year</li> <li>➤ Evaluation that leads to proactive analysis of lessons learned in order to inform recommendations for new or improved participation activity for the future</li> </ul>	

Performance in this area has improved on last year. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a new duty on EROs to encourage electoral participation. The efforts made last year to identify resources which could be redirected from elsewhere in the budget to develop a meaningful programme of promotion have been successful in developing our own public awareness strategy. In addition, staff continue to participate in and assist with any promotional work being carried out by the constituent authorities.

#### 4.3.2 Performance standard 7: Working with partners

This standard aims to ensure that EROs have researched the merits in working with appropriate partners and work with them, where appropriate, to promote electoral participation		
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO has given no consideration to working with any possible partners to promote electoral participation.	
Performance standard	2. The ERO has identified the possibility and benefits of working with partners but has not acted upon the findings of this work.	LVJB assessed at level 2 meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	3. The ERO has consulted department Board's constituent authorities to promote electoral participation and has evaluated the cost/benefits of a joint working arrangement, and has ensured that duplication of effort and unnecessary expenditure is avoided.	
	4. The ERO actively engages with departments of the board's constituent authorities and has identified and consulted with external bodies (such as other authorities, other EROs, local media and community groups) to determine whether working with partners can help achieve the objectives of the public awareness strategy. Joint work has been undertaken where appropriate. The ERO has also developed an evaluation methodology for all activities undertaken with external partners and uses this to plan future work.	

Performance in this area was the same as last year. The Joint Board hosts a Joint Electoral Forum which includes representation from the Returning Officers of the constituent authorities. Part of the function of this forum is to consider opportunities for encouraging electoral participation. This partnership has been instrumental in Joint Board staff working with South Lanarkshire Council staff at various electoral outreach events. This has allowed the Board to achieve an assessment of achieving the performance standard. Promotional work with other EROs has also been achieved. Some difficulty in achieving joint working with North Lanarkshire Council limits our ability to achieve a score above the standard.

#### 4.3.3 Performance standard 8: Accessibility and communication of information

This standard aims to ensure that EROs effectively communicate electoral registration information and provide a simple and user friendly way to access the information to encourage registration applications.

Performance against the standard	Assessment	
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO provides information in one format and has not taken account of the needs of different audiences (for example translation or alternative formats). There are no response mechanisms in place (such as phone, website or email) to ensure that information is correctly and appropriately communicated.	
Performance standard	2. The ERO takes note of relevant legislation and specific research that has been carried out and/or consultation with appropriate organisations to determine the appropriate languages and formats to communicate with relevant audiences. The ERO then communicates information in the most accessible way (website/hard-copy/telephony services) in the appropriate languages and formats. The ERO ensures that all outgoing communication provides the contact details of the local office to allow interested parties to respond and find out further information.	LVJB assessed at level 2 (meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	3. The ERO is responsive to changes in the demographics of the local authority areas and actively researches whether further formats or languages are necessary. The ERO's staff identify and provide support for those who have difficulty filling out the necessary forms both at their offices and at the elector's homes (when requested) throughout the year. The ERO measures and records the success of different dissemination methods and bases future work on this evaluation.	

Performance in this area was the same as last year. The Joint Board sources and maintains a supply of materials in a variety of formats and languages from the Electoral



Commission. We also subscribe to a telephone translation service and provide canvassers with material in a variety of languages to provide to electors. In addition, a new freephone information service was introduced in 2010.

#### 4.4 Planning and organisation

##### 4.4.1 Performance standard 9: Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvass

This standard aims to ensure that EROs have developed robust planning processes for rolling registration and the annual canvass.		Assessment
Performance against the standard		
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO does not have a comprehensive written plan, and relies on unstructured management controls such as oral or written updates, and past experience only. Objectives, risks and resources are not documented.	
Performance standard	2. The ERO has put in place formal plans for rolling registration and the annual canvass. These should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clearly defined objectives and success measures</li> <li>➤ Risks – identification and mitigation</li> <li>➤ Recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed</li> <li>➤ Financial resources</li> <li>➤ Evaluation plan recording the results of the activities undertaken</li> </ul>	LVJB assessed at level 2 (meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	3. In addition to the above, the ERO has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Planned for a specific budget for rolling registration and for the annual canvass, with a breakdown of how this will be used</li> <li>➤ Identified and assessed the needs of the most hard to reach audiences</li> <li>➤ A business continuity plan/succession plan to mitigate unforeseen circumstances such as staff absences</li> </ul>	

Performance in this area was the same as last year. All of the Board's senior staff have been trained in project management techniques and this has contributed to meeting the required standard in this area.

In addition:

budget planning does cover both rolling registration and annual canvass;

a reciprocal agreement has been reached with other EROs to provide cover for unforeseen staff absences; and

work is ongoing in developing a more refined analysis of canvass returns (and non returns) to identify the most hard to reach potential electors and to develop means of reaching them.

#### 4.4.2 Performance standard 10: Training

This standard aims to ensure that EROs have provided appropriate training for staff to deliver the rolling registration and annual canvass processes		
Performance against the standard		Assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The ERO provides no training to either permanent or temporary staff other than a basic induction.	
	2. The ERO provides basic relevant training for permanent members of staff only, to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements.	
Performance standard	3. The ERO provides the relevant training to both permanent and temporary staff to ensure awareness and understanding of the relevant legislative requirements.	LVJB assessed at level 3 (meeting the performance standard).
Above the performance standard	4. The ERO has put in place a comprehensive written training plan for both permanent and temporary staff, and evaluates the effectiveness of the plan (by using a system of feedback and review) on an annual basis.	

Performance in this area was the same as last year. All of the Joint Board's staff receive an annual performance and development review. This includes a rolling 3 year training needs assessment which covers all areas of electoral workload. Temporary staff employed at the annual canvass receive training as part of the canvass process. This meets the required performance standard.

#### 5. Action required

- 5.1. Improvement for 2010 was targeted at remedying the failure to meet performance standard 4 (Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications) and performance standard 6 (Public awareness strategy).

This has now been achieved and I am pleased to report that performance now meets or exceeds all Electoral Commission standards.

Further improvement will now focus on developing areas where the standard is being met to achieve an assessed performance above the standard wherever possible.

#### 6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. None.

#### 7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. None.

## **8. Other Implications**

- 8.1. Risks which may impact on meeting EC performance standards in the future are covered in separate reports on Progress and Risk.

## **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**

1 February 2011

## **Previous References**

Reports of 1 June 2009 & 1 March 2010

## **List of Background Papers**

None

## **Contact for Further Information**

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

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