Elections during the canvass

As with any canvass, your plans should take account of the potential for an election to be held during the canvass period as this is likely to reduce the amount of time available to you to take the necessary steps to follow-up non-responses to canvass communications and ITRs. Your risk register should also address the possibility of an election taking place during the canvass, including how you will redeploy resources to target registration in those areas in which the election is taking place.

If an election is held between 1 July and 1 December, publication of the revised register can be postponed up to 1 February of the following year.

An election during the canvass is defined as any of the following elections, whether general or by-elections, where the date of the poll is between 1 July and 1 December:

- UK Parliamentary elections
- Scottish Parliamentary or Welsh Parliamentary elections
- Local government – unitary, county, county borough, district, metropolitan borough, London borough and directly elected mayoral elections
- Local government – parish and community council elections in England and Wales
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections
- Neighbourhood planning referendums

You will need to make an operational decision whether to delay publication of the revised register and, if so, by how much. In reaching your decision you should consider the impact of the election on the canvass processes within the area affected by the election and across the registration area more generally. In particular, you will need to be satisfied that you will have sufficient time to take all necessary steps to ensure your registers are as accurate and complete as possible by the time of publication. The impact on the canvass processes will likely depend on what stage of the canvass you are at, and also how many polling districts are affected by the election.

You should also consider the impact that postponing the publication of the revised register may have on canvass processes. For example, where the revised register is published by 1 December, the bulk of personal canvassing to follow-up non-responders, is likely to take place in October. Where publication is postponed, and the personal canvass takes place later in the year, reduced daylight hours may impact on the willingness of canvassers to knock on, and non-responders to open, their doors. Inclement weather may also impact on a postponed canvass, and response rates may also reduce over the festive period.

Where you decide to postpone publication due to an election, you should take steps to make local political parties and elected representatives aware of the changed register publication date at an early stage.
There is no requirement to publish a monthly notice of alteration in the month you are publishing the revised register or in the two months before that day, but you may do so if you wish. Where the revised register is published on 1 December, this means that there is no requirement to publish a monthly notice of alteration in October, November or December. If publication of the revised register has been postponed to, for example, 1 February, you will publish a monthly notice of alteration in October and November of the preceding year, but you are not required to publish one in December, or in January, but you may do so if you wish.

Targeting electors

If an election is to be held during the canvass, your key focus will need to be on any new potentially eligible electors you have identified who have not yet registered and encouraging them to make an application in time to be able to vote at the election. This will include electors at addresses to which you have sent a blank canvass form and potential new eligible electors to whom you have given an ITR. You should consider how best to target your resources to these addresses and individuals, including to chase up responses to any ‘reminder’ canvass communications or ITRs, so that as many eligible electors as possible are registered in time for the election.

Your canvass plan should set out what approach you would take in the event of an election during the canvass.

For example, ensuring that the polling district is printed on canvass communications and ITRs will enable you to quickly identify and prioritise those forms that are relevant should there be an election in only part of the registration area. You could also include other registration-related information in the same envelope as an ITR, such as information about the registration deadline for a forthcoming poll.

Where the election affects the whole of the registration area, it will be particularly important that your resources are effectively targeted to maximise the number of eligible electors registered in time to participate in the election. Every effort should be made to conclude all canvass visits to non-responding properties well in advance of the registration deadline, but, given the time constraints and depending on the timing of the election, this might not always be feasible. You should draw on local data records and your knowledge about your local area to identify any new electors, including any properties where there are likely to have been changes. These could then be prioritised for personal visits.

Your plan should address such things as:

- what canvassers will have to do differently
- how canvass staff will be informed that there is an election and given their revised instructions
- what you will do to try to maximise the return of forms in the affected area(s) to reduce potential disenfranchisement
- how you will identify and prioritise the processing of canvass forms and ITRs for area(s) affected by the election
- how the canvass will resume after the election
• how the decision on when to publish the revised register will be taken and what factors will be considered, bearing in mind publication can be delayed up to 1 February
• how you will communicate that decision to local political parties, elected representatives and other interested individuals and groups

Your planning should be flexible enough to allow you to re-allocate staff resources (if necessary) to help ensure that as many forms as possible from the relevant area(s) are collected and returned to the electoral registration office in time to be processed and determined for inclusion in the final election notice of alteration. As detailed in Chapter 2 of Part 2: Registration framework, the local authority that appointed you as ERO must, by law, provide you with the resources you need to discharge your statutory functions.

In your instructions to canvassers, you will have provided details on how often forms should be returned to the registration office. You will need to make clear how this will change if an election occurs. As a minimum, canvassers working in the area affected by an election should be instructed to return as soon as possible any completed voter registration forms that they have collected by the registration application deadline.

Canvassers delivering canvass communications (which cannot be used to register) to non-responding properties in the electoral area(s) affected by the election should be instructed, if they are not already, to encourage any occupiers at the address who are not registered to do so online (or by telephone if you offer this service), and they should also highlight the registration application deadline. They could also have blank registration forms available for potential electors to complete where they do not have access to the internet.

Registration application forms that are collected by canvassers by the registration deadline, even if they are not brought to the office of the Electoral Registration Officer until after the registration deadline, are deemed to have met the registration deadline. To make sure it is clear which forms were received by canvassers by the registration deadline, canvassers should be instructed to suspend their personal visits by not later than the end of the twelfth day before the poll. This will ensure that only forms received before the registration deadline will be processed. If the election only affects part of the registration area, canvassing only needs to pause in the affected area(s) and not across the whole of the registration area.

The use of local media and public awareness exercises may be useful in setting out to residents how they can register to vote in time to be included on the register for use at the election. In the event of any UK-wide poll during the canvass, it will be important to link your local messaging with any communication activity by the Commission in order to maximise its impact.

Where the election crosses local council boundaries, you will need to liaise with the ERO in the other local council(s) to ensure a consistent approach and messaging across the electoral area.
Register to be used for elections taking place during the canvass

Where an election is taking place, you must publish two interim election notices of alteration before publishing the final election notice of alteration on the fifth working day before the poll.iii

**Part 4: ‘Maintaining the register throughout the year’** contains guidance on publishing election notices of alteration.

The register to be used for an election taking place during the canvass will be the revised register published by 1 December the previous year, as amended by subsequent monthly notices of alteration and any election notices of alteration.

Where a candidate requires subscribers, they must appear on the register in force on the last day for publication of the notice of election for the particular election taking place. In practice this will usually be the last notice of alteration published before the notice of election is published; and any subscribers must already be registered or be added to the register by that notice of alteration.

**Chapter 11 of Part 4: ‘Maintaining the register throughout the year’** contains guidance on the deadlines for applications to be made for inclusion on a notice of alteration, including where an election is taking place.
i Section 13(1)(a) RPA 1983
ii Section 3(1)(a) and 13B(4) RPA 1983
iii Sections 13AB and 13B RPA 1983