1. During the oral evidence session at the Committee’s meeting on 31 January, Rob Gibson asked Brian Byrne (Scottish Assessors’ Association) the following question (col 139):

“The register is created and then updated every month or so. How accurate is the register on the current electorate?”

2. Mr Byrne responded by saying:

“Overall, population estimates are reasonably reliable but not perfect, and the overall electorate is something like 93 per cent of the population. However, there will be duplicates and people will be missing—it is swings and roundabouts. We feel that the percentage of completeness in the electoral register is in the 90s.

“Accuracy is a slightly different question. If someone moves, it can take time to catch up with that move, so they might still be on the register but not in the right place. That is partly to do with the fact that registration is annual. People can move within the year and part of the purpose of the canvass is to catch up with them.

“From Electoral Commission research, therefore, we know that the register loses about 1 per cent accuracy throughout the year, and it catches up again at the canvass.”

3. Mr Byrne has since e-mailed to clarify this last point. What he intended to say was that the register loses about 1 per cent accuracy each time it is updated throughout the year.

4. He has further explained:

“There are 10 updates per year, and at 1% per update this amounts to a potential loss of 10% between the end of one canvass and the start of the next, mainly due to population movement. It is in the ERO’s power, and is a duty, to remove electors who have died or moved, and should no longer be registered. Each ERO will have systems to collect information to do this at each update. However, it is no longer in the ERO’s power to simply add people who have moved in to the area or come of age at an update. The ERO needs to receive an individual application from the person.

“EROs will encourage applications and use various means such as publicity, issue part filled forms to new council tax payers, and will collect information from social and private landlords or house builders for forms issue, but ultimately the form needs to be completed, signed, and returned by the elector.
“The difference at a canvass is that two updates are suspended and return of the canvass form is a legal requirement. Any form returned by the household can be treated as an application on behalf of any new elector – new electors do not need to sign the form themselves. During the canvass period, therefore, the balance between removal from, and addition to, the register is restored.

“Perhaps I could refer to a report by the Electoral Commission that dealt with this aspect: *The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain -March 2010*, available at:


At page 2 one of the “Key findings” is stated as follows:

“Each revised electoral register lasts for 12 months, from December to December; during that period, the rate of completeness is likely to decline by around 10 percentage points, owing mainly to population movement (although the rate of decline will be higher in inner London boroughs).”

Also at page 2:

“There is clearly scope to introduce measures locally which would improve the completeness and accuracy of specific registers. However, there are limits to what can be achieved nationally using the current registration system.”

Clerk to the Committee
February 2013