



1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the effects of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in regard to the Electoral Registration process.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the content of the report.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

Introduction

- 3.1 On 10 June 2014 the system of registering to vote changed. Prior to this date the head of the household had responsibility of registering everyone living at their own address. Using the new system, Individual Electoral Registration (IER), electors are now responsible for registering themselves through the Invitation to Register Form (ITR).
- 3.2 The introduction of IER was to prevent electoral fraud and improve the integrity of the electoral register. Each entry on the register is verified, either by DWP or by the elector providing documentary evidence to prove they are a real person. Additionally, the application process has been simplified; electors can now register to vote online and the feedback is that the online application is a quick process to complete.
- 3.2 The 7 May polls were the first elections delivered since the introduction of IER in June 2014. As part of transitional arrangements leading up to the polls, councils were required to submit the existing electoral register to be matched against the records held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Where the records matched, the elector was given a 'green match' status and automatically transferred to the new electoral register. Where the elector did not match they were sent an ITR.
- 3.3 It was recognised from the outset that IER would be challenging particularly in high 'churn' areas (i.e. student areas) and the Government therefore allowed 'red' electors (unmatched) to stay on the register for the 7 May polls. Following the canvass this year, if they still remained 'red' they would be removed from the register on 1 December 2015. There was significant activity therefore to encourage registration and to support effective transition between June 2014 and February 2015.
- 3.4 As part of the Electoral Registration Officer's (ERO) ongoing duty to take all necessary steps for the purpose of maintaining the register, there was a requirement to undertake a full household canvass from July 2015 prior to the publication of the electoral register on 1 December 2015.
- 3.5 This report outlines the impact of IER in terms of the completeness and accuracy of the register during the recent annual canvass.

4.0 The 2015 Canvass

4.1 As part of the duty to take all necessary steps to maintain the electoral register, the household canvass aims to establish the names and addresses of unregistered people who are entitled to be included on the register and those people are then invited them to register. The canvass also aims to establish those people registered but are not entitled to be, to commence the process of deletion.

4.2 The prescribed legal steps for the first full annual canvass under IER include:

- Sending a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to every address, followed by two reminders and a household visit if no response
- Sending Invitations to Register (ITR) to any person named on the HEF who is not currently registered, followed by two reminders and a household visit if no response
- Making contact by other such means as the ERO thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry on the register (i.e. care homes)
- Inspecting records held by any persons which the ERO is permitted to inspect

4.3 48,535 HEFs were sent to properties within the borough to confirm who is resident at an address. Any person added to a HEF was sent an ITR followed by two reminders and one canvasser visit. Any person whose name is removed from the HEF cannot be deleted from the register without secondary evidence, such as council tax evidence. Where the ERO is unable to find secondary removal evidence they will need to send a review letter to the elector in order to remove them.

4.4 This canvass has been significantly larger and more complex than the 2014 traditional canvass. The 2014 canvass focussed upon seeking responses from 'red' individuals whose details had not matched as part of the data matching exercise and had not responded to the ITR's. The only HEFs sent during the 2014 canvass were to empty properties and care homes. The 2015 canvass also had multiple overlapping stages, with the HEF and ITR chase up processes coming together. Whilst the canvass has to be delivered from 1 July and completed by November, in order to publish on 1 December, the format of canvass activity is left to local discretion. The timetable for this year's canvass is set out below:

Date (2015)	Activity	Response rate
Friday 10 July	Canvassers Collect initial forms to hand deliver	Initial forms sent – 48535
Friday 24 July	Delivery of initial forms must be completed.	Response Prior to first reminder – 48.54%
24 August.	1 st reminder forms posted	Total 1 st Reminder Sent – 24972

Friday 4 September	Canvassers Collect 2 nd of reminder forms to hand deliver	Response Prior to second reminder – 63.77%
Friday 18 September	Delivery of 2 nd reminder forms must be completed.	Total 2 nd Reminder Sent – 17584
Thursday 1 October	Canvassers Door Knock Starts	Response Prior to Door Knock – 72.54% Total Door Knocks – 13325
Monday 26 October	Return of completed canvass HEF responses to the Electoral Services Office.	Total Responses at end of canvass - 44031 Percentage Response – 90.72%

4.5 The overall response rate for HEF returns was 90.72%. This is a drop in comparison to the last full annual canvass carried out during 2013, which was 96.35%. As at 1 December the ERO removed 1161 'red' electors from the register who were not registered under the new system. It is important to note that these electors will have been written to, multiple times, and received a canvasser visit. Some of these electors may have moved. The lower response rates are attributed to the fact that the canvasser's primary focus was to chase ITR responses as opposed to HEF responses.

4.6 At the last AEA network meeting, Electoral Managers (including County authorities) reported an average response rate for HEF forms between 90-95%.

5.0 Finance and Resource Impact

5.1 Due to the lower response rates (which was anticipated) coupled with duplicate paperwork arising from the HEF and ITR process, the canvass was more expensive to run compared to the traditional canvass. The additional costs were mainly increase in printing and postage costs, banks staff costs and canvass costs. Whilst there was funding from the government for IER transition the overall shortfall for delivery was £5506.

5.2 For April 2016, IER will be entirely funded by the council. It is therefore critical that options to make registration required to make registration more effective and to achieve the volumes of registration required to register to be complete and accurate, are reflected upon following the recent canvass. Lessons learnt so far are:

- Provide the canvassers with additional time by combining the 2nd reminders with the door knock stage. This will mean the canvassers will be canvassing earlier and will have more daylight to canvass.
- Make it a requirement for canvassers to do a second visit to non-responding properties.
- The ERO needs to review all the letters that we currently send out to see if they are all necessary.
- ERO will continue to need extra casual staff working in the office during the canvass and in the run up to elections.

- The ERO also needs to receive regular updates on any potential new electors or house moves from Housing and Council tax on a regular basis to keep the register up to date.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [DW]

- 6.1 In 2015-16 the additional costs of the IER transition process have been partially offset by the receipt of a government grant for this purpose as set out in paragraph 5.1. However there was still a shortfall of funding of £5,506 for which a supplementary budget was approved.
- 6.2 From April 2016 the annual costs of the IER process will be met in full by the council and are expected to be in the region of £33,000 per annum. These costs have been built into the base budget for 2016-17.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [JB]

- 5.1 The legal implications are contained in the report.

6. CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 IER meets the Corporate Plan Aim 4 – Providing value for money and proactive services.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 None

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 It is the Council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.
- 8.2 It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.

9. KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY – EQUALITY AND RURAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Electoral Services team regularly undertakes impact assessments to ensure that all potential electors are entered on the electoral register.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:
- Community Safety implications
 - Environmental implications
 - ICT implications
 - Asset Management implications
 - Procurement implications
 - Human Resources implications
 - Planning implications
 - Data Protection implications

- Voluntary Sector

Background papers: None

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