



Report of: Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and HR.

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Audit Committee	29 January 2015	All

SUBJECT: Update on Impact of Individual Electoral Registration

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report sets out the effects of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) on the Electoral Register and what steps have been and will be taken in the run up to the UK Parliamentary General Election and beyond.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the contents of the report

3. Background

Introduction

- 3.1 On 10 June 2014 the system of registering to vote changed. This was the biggest change in around 100 years. Everyone is now responsible for registering themselves. Under the old system the 'head of household' could register everyone who lived at their address.
- 3.2 You need to provide a few more details to register - including your national insurance number and date of birth. This makes the electoral register more secure.
- 3.3 Rather than expecting the whole country to re-register under the new system the Government decided to try and passport as many people as possible already registered to vote into the new IER Register. This was done by comparing the electoral register at 1 July 2014 against national records held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and anyone who matched was then confirmed under IER. This was called the Confirmation process.

Confirmation Write Out

- 3.4 In Islington, after some local data matching we managed to confirm around 80% of our existing electors. Prescribed Confirmation Notices were then sent to 120,288 electors over the summer informing them that they were now registered under IER and need not take any further action until such time as they move house or their circumstances change. The remaining 20% or 36,185 electors were invited to

register under the new system.

- 3.5 This 'write-out' was supported by a multi-channel advertising campaign by The Electoral Commission and our own local communications strategy, which included:
- Training Contact Islington Agents,
 - Displaying posters in bus-shelters
 - Posters and leaflets to over 200 other 'contact' points around the borough
 - Writing to Community groups
 - Leaflets in Libraries
 - A Twitter campaign
 - Spotlights on the council website
 - Sign-post article
 - Islington Life article
 - Part of pan-London campaign including posters at Tube stations and adverts in Metro
- 3.6 The regulations required a prescribed A3 registration form was sent to each unconfirmed elector, followed by a reminder and a personal call. The electoral canvassers who called upon the individuals were fully trained on the new system and were tasked with explaining the new system to residents, assisting them where required and encouraging them to register whether via the form or online or by phone.
- 3.7 At publication of the revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2014 Islington had less than 14,000 electors who remained unconfirmed.
- 3.8 One of the requirements of the new law is that no one who was on the register in July and remains unconfirmed at publication of the new register is deleted from it (unless we know they have moved) so they can still vote at the UKPGE.
- 3.9 However, any elector who is unconfirmed is unable to retain or apply for an absent vote until they complete a new registration form and are matched against the DWP.
- 3.10 Islington had to remove absent votes from 910 unconfirmed electors and those affected have been informed.

Impact of no Universal Household Canvass

- 3.11 One of the biggest challenges for Islington is addressing the high turnover of residents or 'churn' that the borough has. Through the annual canvass we normally achieve a response rate of around 95% from households and would typically register 25,000-30,000 new electors and remove around 20,000-25,000 via this process.

Data Mining

- 3.12 Under Section 35 of the Representation of the People Regulations 2001, the Electoral Registration Officer is entitled to access any council held records to help us identify and contact any residents who may not be registered.
- 3.13 We have been working with other council departments to try and identify potential electors and this is done primarily through receiving weekly lists from Council Tax of new accounts who we then contact to try and encourage to register (following the three-step process highlighted at 3.6 above). We also receive information of council tenancy changes on a monthly basis and are talking to parking about access to permits data and to libraries about their data also. All of which should come on stream over the next few months.
- 3.14 So far this has proved a success to the extent that since IER commenced we have identified over 23,000 new potential electors which is almost as many as we would have expected under the 'old' household canvass system. However as the responsibility is now on the individual to register only just over 10,000 have done so.

- 3.15 Through received data, returned forms, correspondence, calls, emails and personal canvassing we have been able to identify around 15,000 for removal from the Register.

Maximising Registration

- 3.16 To try and tackle this we delivered a Household Confirmation Letter to each property in early December stating who was registered to vote at each property and what to do if households needed to add/remove/change details.
- 3.17 We also plan to personally canvass around 13,000 pending electors (those we have identified through data mining but have failed to respond to two invitations to register) from mid-January to early-February.
- 3.18 We will then send to each household another confirmation letter focussing on the forthcoming election highlighting the various deadline dates for registering and applying for postal votes and the channels via which they can make such applications.
- 3.19 Our Communication team will continue to support us in these endeavours to promote voter registration as we move towards the election in May. A communication plan for the next few months is in development but is likely to include much the same channels and media as above at para 3.5.

Under Registered Groups

- 3.20 Two groups of residents have been identified as under registered; those in residential care homes and students.
- 3.21 On care homes we have been building relationships with Adult Social Services and the care homes direct so that we have access to the most up-to-date data and then liaise with the homes to try and establish the information required to register those not currently registered or confirm those not currently confirmed.

Students

- 3.22 It is recognised that the move to IER will make it more difficult to get students registered. Under the old system we would receive lists of which students were in which Halls of Residence from Bursars Offices' and register them from that. However, over the last few years the management companies that increasingly appear to run the Halls of Residence have been less and less inclined to provide this information.
- 3.23 Now under IER we have been part of a Cabinet Office lead Student Forum where work has been done with Academic Registrars and Student Unions to find a solution to the new challenge. In Islington, we have attended Fresher's Fairs and had stalls inside some of the Halls of residence reception areas, where we have promoted IER and used tablets to enable the students to register online straightaway or provided forms and further information where necessary.
- 3.24 We also have a Data Sharing Agreement in place with City University where we are provided with the name, address and nationality of all their Islington based students (including those private renting outside of Halls), who we can then send Invitations to register. We are working towards the same with London Met and expect this to be in place in good time for us to approach those students before the General Election.

Future Improvements

- 3.25 Electoral Services aim to get even better at identifying residents who are not currently registered and to have the promotion of voter registration as part of every conversation council staff have when they interact with residents.
- 3.26 Currently being considered is a project that would link the Electoral Registration software system with the CRM system so that when talking to a resident the Customer Services Agent will know whether or

not they are registered to vote and then take steps to ensure they either register on the phone with them or an invitation to register form is sent to them.

- 3.27 A link to the online registration service has also been added to the My eAccount page so that website visitors are a click away from being able to register to vote.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications

- 4.2 Costs met within existing budget and a Section 31 grant via Cabinet Office to cover extra costs incurred as a result of the introduction of IER.

4.3 Legal Implications

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) (in Islington, the Chief Executive), has a legal duty to compile and maintain the Register of Electors for the area. Individual voter registration was introduced under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2009 with further detailed provisions set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2013. The ERO is required by the legislation to undertake a number of steps to invite citizens who are not on the register to register to vote. Local authorities have a legal duty to provide the ERO with the necessary resources to enable her to discharge her legal functions.

4.4 Environmental Implications

None

4.5 Resident Impact Assessment

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

Disability and community groups have been contacted to raise awareness of the changes and been furnished with information, posters and leaflets. An open invitation for an electoral services officer to visit and help explain the system has been made. Under the old rules only paper applications were accepted so with additional channels of access via internet and telephone registration we may see an increase in registration from those perceived to be harder to reach. Electoral registration regularly has articles in signpost.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

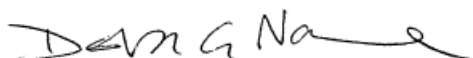
- 5.1 The council is required by legislation to implement a new system of voter registration and good progress has been made so far in preparation for the forthcoming general election and other future elections. The committee is asked to note the progress made.

Appendices: none

Background papers: none

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and HR. Date

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