

FOR PUBLICATION

**INTRODUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL VOTER REGISTRATION-
UPDATE (EC000)**

MEETING: EMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL COMMITTEE

DATE: 3 NOVEMBER 2014

REPORT BY: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

WARD: ALL

COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES: ALL

BACKGROUND PAPERS NONE

FOR PUBLICATION

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To report on the progress of the transition to the introduction of Individual Voter Registration (IER).
- 1.2. To outline plans to deliver IER prior to and following the publication of the first IER register on 1 December 2014.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Individual voter registration was introduced in England and Wales in June 2014 replacing the household system of registration. In addition people can now register to vote online for the first time.

- 2.2. The transition began with a data matching exercise to compare existing elector's details with the details held on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database – a process known as confirmation live run (CLR).
- 2.3. Through this process, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) were able to identify which electors could be transferred automatically to the new IER register, and which ones could not and would therefore need to re-register.
- 2.4. On 10th July 2014 we sent our data to be matched against the DWP database. Everyone whose name and address on the Electoral Register matched against this database was allocated a “Green” score and was confirmed on the Electoral Register under the new system. Those who partially but not completely matched were given an “Amber” score and those who did not match at all were given a “Red” score. Chesterfield Borough Council's results from this project are below:

Confirmation Live Run Result	Number	Percentage
Green	69702	85.66%
Amber	1090	1.34%
Red	10583	13.01%

- 2.5. Of this result the Reds and Ambers were then matched against locally held data (specifically Council Tax data) to confirm as many as possible of these so they did not have to register again under the new system. The results of the Local Data Matching are below:

Local Data Matching Result				
Number of records matched	6041 (51.75%)	Number of records not matched	5632 (48.25%)	
Updated Green after	Red (RAG) Local	Amber Result Data	Number	Percentage

Matching		
Green	75743	93.08%
Red	5632	6.92%

After Local Data Matching all Amber scores were either matched to Green or Red using Local Data.

As a result of this exercise 75743 people (93.08%) were fully registered under the new system. The remaining 5632 people were invited to re-register under the new system. These people remain registered until December 2015, unless their entitlement to registration changes, eg they move house, but they will be unable to vote by Post or by Proxy if they do not re-register.

- 2.6. Following the confirmation process, the 'write-out' phase of the transition commenced in early August, coinciding with a national publicity campaign by the Electoral Commission and local publicity. This replaced the traditional canvass of households for 2014 though this will be reintroduced in autumn 2015. There were three key elements to the IER write out – Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) sent to all properties with no electors registered and properties which did not respond at the last canvass; confirmation letters sent to individuals whose details matched through the CLR and Invitations to Register (ITRs) sent to those individuals who didn't match with DWP records. The ITR and HEFs have been followed up with reminders and personal visits to the properties where no response has been forthcoming.
- 2.7. During the period of the write out efforts have continued to be made to carry out further manual data matching of the outstanding "red matches" to try to confirm residency status and where necessary to carry out registration reviews where it appears a person is no longer resident at an address.
- 2.8. Arrangements were made with the council's call centre to handle calls received following the write out. Training was provided to call centre staff and two "champions" trained to handle the more detailed enquiries. Over the period August and

September the call centre received 974 customer queries. A significant number of the calls related to requests to opt out of the open register. Over 5,500 calls have also been made to the automated telephone service to register an opt out change. In Chesterfield as in the rest of England and Wales, the wording on the confirmation letter generated a large number of queries as to whether people already opted out of the register needed to take any further action to retain this status. It is worth noting that EROs had no discretion over the wording of the letter which had been subject to extensive advance user testing by the Electoral Commission.

- 2.9. An update on the latest response figures will be given at the meeting:

3.0 MAXIMISING REGISTRATION- KEY PRIORITIES

Data mining and data matching

- 3.1. The transitional canvass and confirmation write out has now been completed and between now and the publication of the revised register on 1 December work will continue on data matching and data mining to improve the accuracy of the register. The primary sources of data for identifying new electors, verifying existing entries and removing individuals outside of a canvass are the records held by the council. The ERO has a statutory right to use these records for electoral registration purposes, and the principal sources of data are council tax and housing benefit, housing tenancy records and customer contacts through the call centre.

Customer Services and Technology Transformation Programmes

- 3.2. Electoral registration is a potential major beneficiary of the Great Place Great Service Programme work streams on Customer Service and Technology. We are already actively exploring suitable, efficient and cost effective channels of communication for engaging, signposting and transacting with our electorate, particularly through the medium of on line

registration, e.g. CBC website, call centre, customer services centre, automated message services, automated form completion services, eg to request an application form, or to request a postal vote or opt out of the commercial register.

- 3.3. The council's customer services strategy and its focus on channel shift to more on line customer transactions will assist in our efforts to promote and encourage on line voter registration and electronic communication with our existing and potential electorate. This has the potential to provide a more effective and up to date customer database from which to identify new electors and those no longer current. It also offers the possibility of considerable savings through the automation of processes and the reduction in paper, printing, postage and individual contact through personal visits, all of which have considerably increased with the introduction of IER. As part of this we will be using lean review methodology through Business Transformation to examine the impact of changes on registration activity workflows and work processes to ensure service efficiency and effectiveness.

Other data sets

- 3.4. Our reliance on internal council data sets will not give us access to all those entitled to register. It is widely recognised that IER will have a disproportionate impact on certain groups including 16 and 17 year olds who need to be on the register so that they can vote in elections when they reach the age of 18 and adults in residential care. Our approach to address this has two main strands: securing access to data from Derbyshire County Council, discussions for which are at an advanced stage and action through our Engagement Strategy. We also have agreement from Chesterfield College to access student names and addresses. We will continue to explore opportunities for using other authorities' data where these may provide additional and accurate records. At a national level the government is actively looking at the availability of other data sets to assist EROs such as DVLA records.

Engagement Strategy

3.5. Young people

Specific activity is in place to engage with this group and raise awareness of electoral registration and why it is important, for example by the use of promotional materials, registration events and participation resources with schools, such as “bite the ballot” interactive student sessions. A programme of resources for engaging with secondary schools is currently being developed in consultation with the Executive member for Governance and it is the intention to maintain this programme once it is introduced. Discussions are underway with Chesterfield College to embed electoral registration as much as possible within college registration systems and admissions processes and in college communications with students.

3.6. Nursing homes

Good progress is being made in contacting all nursing homes in the Borough to establish relationships with care home managers to facilitate ongoing registration of elderly residents and notification of residency changes.

3.7. Communication and public awareness

A key focus of our engagement strategy is in promoting on line registration and where this is not an option, the alternatives available to our customers. There are numerous communication channels and communities of interest within and via the council through which to promote registration and raise awareness for example, web site, social media, Your Chesterfield, Borough Bulletin, community assemblies, local consultation forums, community and business partnership networks, tenants associations, council tax billing notifications, leisure centres, customer contact centre, and call centre. Local census information, socio-demographic data/ ward profiling and ward analysis of registration levels will help to assist us to identify under represented and hard to reach groups and develop appropriate target mechanisms and messages.

Outside of the council, activity is focusing on developing relationships with letting agencies, estate agents and private landlords to promote IER amongst home movers and raising public awareness through communications more generally with relevant local organisations, eg libraries, major employers, LINKS. In addition we shall shortly be embarking on a broader mailing campaign to local organisations and relevant businesses in the Borough to offer leaflets, posters, and electronic logos and links to the national register to vote website. Alongside this we will explore opportunities to work with local and national partners on initiatives and events to promote voter registration, for example Bite the Ballot and National Voter Registration Day 2015.

4.0 2015 CANVASS

- 4.1. There will be a canvass of households in the autumn of 2015 and annually thereafter under current provisions. Unlike previously, electors will not be removed from the register for failure to respond to a canvass, and will remain on the register until they move address or otherwise become ineligible to be on the register. Deletion of names on the canvass form will require the ERO to obtain a second piece of evidence in order for the removal to be effected. The other main change is that electors who add their names to the canvass form will no longer be automatically added to the register but will be sent an ITR. The ERO will be required to follow up non-responses to requests to complete a canvass or an ITR with up to two reminders and a personal visit. There will be a year round requirement to conduct such follow up activity to meet EROs new responsibilities to encourage registration. The use of data mining and data matching will therefore be a key element in helping to maintain an accurate and up to date register.
- 4.2. It is anticipated that the government will provide additional funding in 2014/15 towards meeting the cost of a mini canvass in January 2015 by way of a notification of confirmation of those registered. This is designed to assist EROs to capture changes to the register ahead of the May 2015 elections.

4.3. Year round canvassing is a new feature of IER whereby ERO's must follow up non-responses to ITRs and HEFs with reminders and at least one personal visit. The emphasis of the personal visit will be on speaking to potential electors to encourage them to register and offering assistance where required. At this stage it is not proposed to try to gather personal details such as dates of birth and national insurance numbers on the door step. Once the current write out activity has been completed a picture of normal business of rolling registration under IER will begin to emerge. It will then be possible to establish more clearly what the resource requirement for carrying out personal visits will be. Until then this activity will be conducted using current casual staff.

5.0 POLITICAL PARTY CAMPAIGNING

5.1. The Electoral Commission is preparing new guidance and code of conduct for political parties on handling applications for registration, absent vote applications and postal ballot packs. The new code will be published by the end of November in time for the 2015 elections. The code seeks to improve confidence in the security of electoral processes in the UK, while at the same time ensuring that the integrity of electoral processes are balanced against the risks to effective voter participation. In relation to IER the EC comments that there are likely to be significant data protection risks if third parties, including campaigners collect or handle sensitive personal information on registration applications.

5.2. The key changes in the draft code are:

- To make clear that campaigners should not handle or take completed registration forms, postal vote or proxy vote application forms or completed postal ballot packs from electors. Once they have been completed by electors, electoral registration forms, postal vote or proxy vote application forms should be sealed and sent directly by the elector to the Electoral Registration Officer. Electors who are unable personally to return an electoral registration form or

absent vote application should contact the Electoral Registration Officer directly for assistance.

- Campaigners should ensure that any electoral registration forms and postal or proxy voting application forms conform fully to the requirements of electoral law, including all the necessary questions and the options open to electors. (Campaigners are requested to use forms supplied by the ERO or from the Electoral Commission, or to encourage on line application).
- Campaigners should be free to encourage voters to register to vote, including on line, and apply to vote by post or appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf, if that is the most convenient way for them to vote.
- That campaigners should refer voters to staff at the elections office for assistance in completing and returning postal ballot papers.

5.3. Further details will be circulated to political groups once the new code of conduct has been published. The changes will also be addressed in candidates and agents briefings in advance of the 2015 elections. This will also include guidance on advising electors of the registration deadlines and the new information requirements under IER.

6.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1. The government is meeting the additional costs of Individual Electoral Registration in accordance with the new burdens doctrine. To date the following funding has been received:

2013/14 transitional funding of £6,233

2014/15 IER grant of £23,452

Maximising registration grant of £4,368

Hardware grant of £13,007

Top up grant of £2071 to cover additional costs of printing A3

forms. Grant to meet 10 funded days training for IER process and software system.

- 6.2. The government has announced that further transitional funding will be available in 2015/16 and an announcement is expected later in the year. However it is expected that this amount will be significantly less than the 2014/15 allocation. For 2015/16 and beyond, it is anticipated that the costs of electoral registration will increase although it is difficult to project these additional costs with any certainty until activity during the transition phase is fully evaluated, including the take up of registration on line.

7.0 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1. In writing this report the following standard corporate issues have been considered:

- Risk Management
- Equalities
- Health and Safety

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1. That the Committee notes the progress made to date in relation to the transition to Individual Electoral Registration, and the ERO's approach to delivering and maintaining a secure, accurate and up to date electoral register in compliance with his statutory duties.

For further information on this report contact Sandra Essex
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Sandra Essex

Democratic Services Manager

Appendix 1

The following update on the latest response figures since the introduction of IER was given at the meeting.

- New electors added to the register – 1343
- Online applications received (re-registering people who did not match as well as new electors) – 2475
- Electors who details had not been matched and who had not yet re-registered – 2388
 - Of the above electors, the number who had postal or proxy votes that would be lost on 1st December – 219
- Number of electors deleted – 3569
- Total number of electors on the register – 79127
- Number of electors whose details have been confirmed – 76739 (97%)