

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Governance Committee – 26 February 2015

Report of Chief Officer Legal and Governance

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides a summary of the change to Individual Electoral Registration and an update on the current situation.

This report supports the Key Aim of – Effective use of council resources

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming

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Recommendation to Governance Committee: That the committee note the current position of Individual Electoral Registration.

Reason for recommendation: To provide members with an update on Individual Electoral Registration.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced Individual Electoral Registration (IER), which is the most significant change to the electoral registration system for 100 years. The change is aimed at tackling perceived electoral fraud and improving both the perception and the integrity of the registration process. Individual Electoral Registration is also intended to provide a more convenient, secure and modern way for individuals to register and thereby maximise both the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. IER provides the ability for residents to register online.
- 2 The Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission published an IER guide for Members in June 2014, and an update in December. These documents are attached at Appendices A and B.

Government Responsibility

- 3 The Cabinet Office is responsible for the roll out of IER and put in place Regional Delivery Managers and County Leads who acted as intermediaries between local authorities and the Cabinet Office.

Registration

- 4 Members will be familiar with the previous system of electoral registration and the annual canvass form which was sent to every residential property in the District. One person in the household was then responsible for completing this, in order to register everyone who lived at that address.
- 5 With the introduction of IER, each person wishing to be entered on the Electoral Register is required to register to vote individually, rather than by household. In addition, residents are asked to provide identifying information, such as a date of birth and national insurance number. This enables their application to be verified with the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) records before they are added to the register. In specific circumstances people who cannot provide this information may prove their identity using an alternative form of evidence such as a passport or driving licence. (Registration can be done online or by form.)

Introduction of IER

- 6 Following the going live of IER, on 16th June 2014 the Register of Electors was sent to the DWP for data matching against their records. Of approx. 90,000 electors on the Register, 83% (some 74,700) were successfully verified against the DWP records and registered automatically. They subsequently received Confirmation Letters that they had been registered under IER.
- 7 The remaining 17% (some 15,300) electors' details were not successfully verified with the DWP. They were subsequently sent Invitations to Register (ITR), which asked them to provide details of their National Insurance Number and their date of birth so that they could be re-checked and successfully verified against the DWP's records.
- 8 As part of the transition to IER the regulations provide that all electors' registered before IER are all transferred to the new IER Register until December 2015, enabling them all to vote in the May elections whether they have been confirmed by data matching or not. The only proviso to this is that those who are unmatched and were previously registered as Postal or Proxy voters lose this status. This means that, unless they can provide the required evidence to be data matched before May, they will only be able to vote in person at that time.
- 9 There were some 400 cases in this category, and the Elections Team processed all of these individually in order to make sure they were aware of the situation and to help them to become fully registered under IER.
- 10 It is the case that any elector on the Register not verified under IER cannot be given a Postal or Proxy vote and can only vote in person at the May elections. Also, all of these electors will subsequently fall off the Register unless they become data matched under IER.

Ongoing Registration work

- 11 As part of the new requirements, non responses to ITRs must be followed up with two reminders sent to the relevant elector and/or property respectively. Personal canvassing was also carried out during the Autumn 2014 'Transitional Canvass'.
- 12 On the completion of the canvass on 28th November 2014 a new annually revised register of electors was published which comprised all those who made successful individual applications and those on the Spring 2014 register who had not yet reapplied under IER.
- 13 At the time of writing this report there are only 1,313 (1.5%) voters on the Register who have not been verified under IER, reduced considerably from the figure arising from the initial data matching exercise. Work is ongoing to target these electors to ensure those entitled to be registered provide the necessary evidence to be IER registered.
- 14 A mini-canvass is in the process of being carried out during February, with letters being sent to every household listing the voters registered. This is to help ensure the Register is as up to date and accurate as possible ready for the May elections.
- 15 The Elections Team has also been visiting and working with Care Homes in the District in order to pick up these often hard to reach electors.

Electoral Services with Business as Usual

- 16 Electoral Services have experienced a significant increase in its workload since the introduction of IER. Registration is now an all year process and involves sending reminders and conducting a personal visit in the event that a resident fails to respond to letters. This has inevitably led to a significant increase in the number of procedures to follow, the number of different work streams under way at any given moment and an increase in documents to produce in comparison to the previous Electoral Registration system, which of course has financial implications.
- 17 The ongoing function of IER has been termed nationally as 'Business as Usual' or (BAU). By 2016 it is expected that the new system will be embedded and in place. It is certain that a point in time will come when Cabinet Office will withdraw entirely from IER, this could be as early as the end of 2016.

Key Implications

Financial

Funding has been received from the Government for the introduction of IER (some £57,000) to date. This is distributed upon a formulae basis. There is no guarantee that support will continue in to the future.

In addition a grant of some £11,400 has been received towards the cost of the mini-canvass currently in progress.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

It is imperative that the new legislation under The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 is followed. Cabinet Office have provided risk assessment templates for the transition to IER and these templates have been kept up to date.

Additionally the audit team at Sevenoaks District Council are conducting an internal audit of our transition to IER in 2 phases. The first phase (the introduction of IER) is complete. The second phase will commence in February and will focus on how IER affects the May 2015 elections.

Equality Assessment

No Equality implications.

Conclusions

The introduction of IER has had a large impact on electoral registration practices within the Electoral Services team and there has been a financial implication which has largely been met by the Cabinet Office. Electors have had to adjust to the change in the registration system and complaints have been minimal. A write out to all electors commenced at the end of January in order to secure the accuracy of the register for the May 2015 elections. In the short term future Cabinet Office Support for IER will cease and effectively IER under 'business as usual' will be the system of electoral registration.

Appendices

Appendix A – Individual Electoral Registration the transition A guide for Members

Appendix B – Individual Electoral Registration Update A Guide for Members December 2014

Background Papers:

[The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013](#)

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