

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Monday 25 November 2013

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER)

Report of the Assistant Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee notes the implications of IER for the Council and endorses the awareness raising methods proposed.

Summary

To outline the proposals and implications for individual electoral registration due to come into force in 2014.

Statutory Powers

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Introduction

1. The current system of electoral registration has been in place for many years. Electors register to vote through the annual canvass of households carried out each year (August - November) and can register anytime throughout the year under the 'rolling registration' system. In 2006 the process was altered to allow registration up to 11 working days before an election, previously applications would have been required 6 to 8 weeks before an election. A new system of individual electoral registration is being introduced to have effect from 2014. However, initial work and testing has already commenced. This report aims to update the Committee on these revised arrangements for electoral registration, and the increased financial and staffing implications.

The Current Registration System

2. The purpose of the annual canvass is to check the accuracy of the register by identifying new electors and those who are registered but no longer eligible.
3. Canvass forms only need to be checked and completed by one member of household who can do this on behalf of all the other residents.

4. Residents can currently make a canvass return by post, freephone telephone or internet. The freephone and internet options can only be used where there are no changes to the existing registrations.
5. A new register is published on 1st December each year at the end of the canvass period.
6. Where an elector does not respond to the canvass, their name can be carried forward for one year if there is no evidence to indicate they have moved from the address.
7. Rolling registration applications are used to update the register on a monthly basis.
8. Reminder canvass forms are sent to properties and visits are made house to house by canvassers in order to encourage a response from every household.
9. There are different systems in place for special category electors; these include overseas electors and HM Forces Service voters.

Individual Electoral Registration - outline

10. Individual electoral registration (IER) is being introduced nationally to reduce electoral fraud and improve the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register. When introduced, each person wanting to appear on the register must make an individual application. It will be a matter of choice for the individual if they wish to register, which is different to the current property-based system.
11. Electoral Registration Officers (ERO's) should be satisfied that each application for registration is made in respect of a person who is eligible to register, that the person exists and that the person making the application is the person who is the subject of the application.
12. The new legislation requires individuals to provide their National Insurance Number (NINO) and date of birth (DOB). These can be checked electronically against Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) records via Government Digital Services. Existing elections software (Express) has been, and continues to be, upgraded to enable this communication between systems to take place. Fourteen national IER pilot schemes were run in 2012. This showed that a typical 'complete match' rate with DWP records was around 70%.
13. Eastleigh's test (or 'dry run') of this new process took place on 30 July 2013, and an 84% complete match with DWP records was received (one of the highest in the country). Work has now concluded to raise this figure even further with 'local matching' against the Council Tax register so that there is less work transferring across to an IER-based register next year. The 'complete match' or green figure now stands at 88%. Such 'local matching' is a new responsibility for the Electoral Registration Officer, year on year.

14. It was initially proposed that individuals should provide their signature as part of the IER process, however this provision has been dropped as it is not considered that a signature would add any significant security and the authenticity of a signature could not be verified. This removal will also facilitate future developments, for example registering by internet or telephone where it would not be possible to provide a signature.
15. If individuals are unwilling or unable to provide their NINO or DOB, there is an exceptions process. These individuals will be asked to provide other forms of identification such as a passport or photo driving licence. Such individuals will be required to produce two items from a specified list to include a form of ID which contains a photograph; an alternative to this is to require non-photographic ID combined with attendance at the Civic Offices.
16. Verification of addresses will continue as at present with ERO's checking their records with the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG).
17. Verification of a connection between an individual and an address is to be established either by an individual responding to a direct invitation sent to a known address by the ERO or, where an unsolicited application takes place, by the ERO seeking confirmation by writing to the individual at the address.

IER Process

18. A summary of the IER implementation timetable is as follows:

Outline IER Timetable	
• January 2013	ERA Act
• Early 2013	Secure data transfer connectivity tests
• April - September 2013	Draft regulations and guidance
• April 2013 onwards	Preparation plan, updates and monitoring
• April 2013 onwards	Project planning and issues/risk register
• July - August 2013	Confirmation dry run
• July – September 2013	Absent vote signature refresh
• October 2013 onwards	Postponed household canvass starts
• 8 November 2013	Final IER timetable confirmed by Government / Cabinet Office
• Winter 2013/early 2014	Conduct review of Polling Places
• By 17 February 2014	Publish revised register
• 2013 and 2014	Preparation and training for IER
• 22 May 2014	Triple Elections

• 1 July 2014	Start of IER and confirmation live run
• Summer/autumn 2014	National awareness campaign
• By 1 December 2014	Publish revised registers

19. A delayed canvass, on the current arrangements, has now commenced and will run to February 2014, so that the register is as up to date as possible for IER and the May 2014 elections. The Committee is reminded that the European, Borough and Parish elections are all being held on 22 May 2014, the first time ever that a 'triple election' has been run on the same day. This in itself has increased resource implications.
20. The first IER canvass begins on 1 July 2014 and ends on 1 December 2014. Currently, canvass forms refer to a relevant date of 15 October asking for details of individuals who are resident on 15 October. This relevant date will no longer be used.
21. Household Enquiry Forms (or HEFs) will now be sent to every residence each year. However, as a thorough canvass will be conducted under the current arrangements later this year, the 2014 canvass, will be 'light'; that is, everyone whose details remain unchanged from the 2013/14 'old' canvass will not have to apply to be re-registered under IER – they will just be transferred across to the new system.
22. The completion of a HEF will not automatically result in a 'new' elector being added to the Electoral Register, as an individual application must always be made. In many circumstances, then, this will require an elector to complete two forms rather than the current one (a HEF and application form). The Council must 'encourage' registration, including a personal visit to non-responders. A new problem, of course, is that a canvasser will be unlikely to get all occupiers of a property in at the same time, and many will be reluctant to supplying their NINOs and DOBs, particularly on their doorstep. Canvassing will therefore become more cumbersome and costly, with potentially multiple visits required.
23. Despite much 'soft' terminology being used (eg individuals being 'invited' and 'encouraged' to apply etc), civil penalties will be sought from individuals who do not register; the amount of this has yet to be set by the government.
24. The transition period will include carry forward arrangements; those electors who fail to respond in 2014 will be carried forward to the 2015 register (published on 1st December 2014) to ensure that they are able to vote in the 2015 General Election.
25. From 2015 onwards, those who are registered under IER will not be required to re-register; they will remain registered until the annual canvass suggests they are no longer resident, or they notify the ERO that their details have changed or information from other sources prompts further enquiries.

Arrangements for Absent Voters and Special Category Electors

26. Electors with existing absent vote arrangements can only retain their entitlement to vote by post or proxy if they are registered individually in time to be included in the revised register published by 1 December 2014. Those with existing proxy votes will additionally only retain their proxy appointment if their proxy is also registered individually in that revised register, or will be registered. There will be, therefore, a specific version of the invitation to register to use with these electors that explains these provisions.
27. The provisions described in the above paragraph only take effect on publication of the revised register by 1 December 2014. This means that any elector with an existing absent vote arrangement will retain it and will be able to vote by post or proxy as applicable if an election is held during the canvass (unless they ask to cancel in the meantime).
28. Persons nominated as proxies must be registered under IER.
29. Special category electors currently register under system of declarations which is separate to the annual canvass, these registrations last one year from the application date (five years for service voters). The proposal for these types of electors is that they are invited to register under IER at the time when their declaration is due for renewal.

Implications

30. Electors who were carried forward in 2013 to the 2014 register, and who fail to respond in 2014, will NOT be carried forward to the register published on 1st December 2014 as they will have already been carried forward for one year. These electors will not therefore be able to vote in the 2015 elections unless they make an application to register under IER before the election date.
31. If the NINO and DOB must be checked for every elector, this will mean that the registration of an elector will take longer. Electors registering using the exceptions process will potentially be more involved as they will be attending the offices in person to be seen by a member of staff.
32. Absent voters who fail to register under IER will lose their absent vote.
33. It is inevitable that there will be resource implications for all Councils when IER is introduced. Key here is the impact on technical IT services with the introduction of new processes and changes to systems. Initial system changes have been implemented already in conjunction with Legal and Democratic Services. However further work and support will be required going forward. This has been programmed into the Customer Services and ICT Unit's workload as a priority project.
34. Given the exceptionally high workload over the coming two years, but specifically the back-to-back delayed canvass / triple elections / IER launch, Management Team (at its meeting on 7 August 2013) supported a request to delay relocating the Elections Team to Eastleigh House until after the May 2014 elections. Any delayed move to the new offices will also incur extra

support from ICT with provision of support from two separate office locations. However this represents a much lower risk strategy for Legal and Democratic Services during this intense election period. A detailed work programme of the practical implications is now being drawn up in consultation with key staff, before seeking approval from the Civic Offices Project Board.

35. The Cabinet Office has provided Eastleigh with £7,131 for initial expenses. Currently, more funds can be applied for (in respect of communicating with 'hard-to-reach' groups), although applications have to be justified and fully quantified to the Cabinet Office. A summary of the main funding arrangements, though, are as follows:

IER FUNDING
<p><u>2013/2014 Financial Year</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 31 grant; formulaic grant, paid April 2013 • Cost of confirmation dry run (flat rate basis) • Change implementation (population basis) <p><u>2014/2015 Financial Year</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation dry run results Sept 2013 - indicative funding allocations - ministerial letter October 2013 • Option to apply for additional funds - bidding open November 2013 to January 2014, outcome given in February 2014 • Ministerial letter with final allocations in March 2014 - initial allocations and additional funds • Section 31 grant paid April 2014 <p><u>2015/2016 Financial Year</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New burdens doctrine • Part of Government spending review

36. In the longer term, additional administrative support will likely be required to assist with an increase in queries, carrying out verification checks, assisting electors to understand the new process and handling a large increase in paper forms. Democratic Services staff, who will sit alongside Elections in Eastleigh House, will provide key support in the interim.
37. It is understood that, in time, there will be increased online registration options available. However, in the shorter term, stationery costs will effectively double.

38. Special consideration will need to be given to canvassing nursing homes and other similar residences where the elderly or vulnerable currently rely on the manager or matron to complete a form on behalf of all residents. Similarly, ensuring young people register will continue to be a challenge, as the onus is now on them to register individually rather than just be picked up on a household-based form.

Publicity

39. The Council is required by the Electoral Commission to prepare a detailed implementation plan for IER. Work is underway on this. However, alongside this, the Electoral Commission require Councils to draw up a separate, local Public Engagement Strategy to compliment the National Awareness Campaign being run by the Commission, in conjunction with the Cabinet office, in Summer/Autumn 2014.
40. The Public Engagement Strategy template and guidance gives Councils a number of ideas and steers as to how to make the public aware of the change in the registration process. Whilst, for example, the Elections Team can prepare a FAQs sheet, the help of the Communications Team will be needed to develop a comprehensive approach to engage with other different communities. Such related issues may well be picked up through the Review of Polling Places which the Council is required to do every five years. This is to take place at the start of 2014, and a member of the Democratic Services Team has been appointed to lead on this.

Financial Implications

41. There will be additional work to be undertaken with regards to the requirement for electors to provide a DOB and NINO and for these to be checked by the ERO. EROs will spend time checking these details and seeing those people who use the exceptions process. The result of this is that additional support staff will be needed in due course, but this cannot be accurately quantified at this stage.

Conclusion

42. Individual electoral registration is being introduced from 2014. The new process is summarised in the appendices. This will increase the workload for electoral registration. There are staffing and resource implications which will need to be planned for accordingly.

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Appendices Attached:	1

Appendix 1

EXISTING PROCESS (ALTHOUGH DELAYED THIS YEAR, OCT – FEB INSTEAD)

STEP 1

Mid August

- Pre-printed forms sent to household via canvasser

STEP 2

Mid October

- Reminder pre-printed forms sent to every non-responding household via canvasser

STEP 3

Late October - Mid November

- Canvassers visit non-responding properties with pre-printed forms and attempt to get a response
- Non-responding properties are left a leaflet reminding to return the form and indicating the canvasser will make one further visit

STEP 4

Late October - Mid November

- Canvassers re-visit non-responding properties with pre-printed forms and attempt to get a response
- Non-responding properties are left a further reminder form

IER – 2014 ONLY

STEP 1

From 1st July 2014 onwards

- Household Enquiry Form (HEF) sent to the household to identify potential eligible electors
- Where there is no change at the property, residents transferred across from the old to the new register
- Potential new electors, identified through the HEF canvass, sent application forms to apply to go on the register

STEP 2

- Send up to two reminders to IER and HEF non-responders

STEP 3

- Canvasser to visit IER non-responders on at least one occasion
- Discretion to send canvasser to HEF non-responders

STEP 4

- Notify non-responding absent voters that they have been carried forward (provided they were not carried in the previous year) but they have lost their absent vote and how to reinstate this

CROSS CHECK INFORMATION WITH DWP LOCAL MATCHING TO IMPROVE PERCENTAGE RATE

IER – 2015 ONWARDS

STEP 1

Timing to be determined by ERO, but will be earlier than at present, eg, July

- Pre-printed HEF sent to every property to identify those who are on the register and entitled to remain, those who are no longer eligible and new occupants or attainers. Only one person will be required to return this form.
- Online or after return/provision of information to be enabled.

*** Those who are registered under IER do not need to re-register***

STEP 2

- Potential electors identified from HEF forms to be followed up individually with a pre-populated IER form

STEP 3

- Send at least two reminders to HEF and IER non-responders

STEP 4

- Personal canvasser to visit HEF and IER non-responders on at least one occasion. Non-response will not result directly in elector removal - this has to be removed by the ERO

CROSS CHECK INFORMATION WITH DWP LOCAL MATCHING

NOTE

Removing electors from the register has also become more complex - simply telling the Elections Team that you have moved home out of the borough, for example, will not result in your deletion from the register. The ERO must review removed requests and can only remove someone from the electoral register when:

- they have received notice from the Government Digital Services or they have information from at least two data services (yet to be defined) or
- they are provided with a death certificate
- they are notified by the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages

The ERO may make house to house enquiries for the purpose of deciding whether or not to determine an elector was not entitled to be registered or has ceased to be resident. Determination of removals must be made before the publication of the revised register.