

# Electoral Provisions Sub-Committee

11 June 2014

## INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

### 1. Summary

1.1 To update the Sub-committee on the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Sub-committee notes the report.

### 3. Background and Discussion

3.1 The Government is making significant changes to the way that people can register to vote from 2015. Currently people are added to the electoral register through an annual canvass process which normally takes place between August and November each year through which each property in the Borough receives a household canvass form seeking details of eligible electors resident. This is completed by one person on behalf of the household. The new Annual Register of Electors is normally published on 1<sup>st</sup> December each year. People are added to or deleted from the Annual Register throughout the rest of the year through a process of monthly rolling registration whereby they complete and submit a registration form and the changes are made by the publication of notices of alteration each month.

3.2 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 this process will change. In future every elector will be required to register individually and their details will be checked against information held by the Department of Works and Pensions. New applicants will also have to provide details of their name, date of birth and their National Insurance number.

3.3 This is the most fundamental change in the process of electoral registration in a hundred years and is a major change programme for electoral services. The transition to IER begins on 10 June. Although there will be a national campaign to raise awareness of the changes it is likely that there will be considerable confusion and some reluctance to accept the changes from the public. The Cabinet Office has recently released a briefing paper for Members which has been circulated to all members of the Council. This report updates the Sub-committee on preparations for the introduction of IER.

### 4. Individual Electoral Registration (IER) – The Major Changes

4.1 From 10 June 2014 onwards electors will be required to register to vote individually rather than as at present whereby one person fills in an annual canvass form on behalf of the rest of the residents of the

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household. In order to register to vote an individual will have to provide their name, address, date of birth and National Insurance number

- 4.2 All applications to register individually will undergo a process of data matching against information held on DWP's Customer Information System database to verify applications.
- 4.3 To ensure that the process of transition is as painless as possible for most people the Government has decided that where people are registered on the electoral register prior to the move to IER and their data matches information held by DWP they will automatically be transferred to the new transitional register and will not have to take any further action. This process, known as the "confirmation live run", will take place on 30 June 2014 and will involve the Council submitting the data on the electoral roll, around 72,200 records, to be matched against DWP records.
- 4.4 After 10 June 2014 all new applications for registration must be by way of an individual application and anyone with a postal or proxy vote must have registered individually in order to retain their absent vote. Everyone on the register who has not been confirmed as a result of the confirmation live run will be contacted and invited to make an individual application to register and properties where the Registration Officer believes there may be eligible people will be sent a Household Enquiry Form. Non-respondents will receive further invitations to register including a visit by a canvasser.
- 4.5 Nobody who is registered on the Register of Electors published in December 2014, but who has not been registered under IER, will be removed until the following year – this is to ensure that all electors registered under the old system are able to vote in the General Election in May 2015.
- 4.6 The new Register published on 1 December 2015 will only consist of registrations made under IER, either by way of confirmation or by new application. Anyone who has not done so will be removed from the register and new registrations will continue to be made under the new system.
- 4.7 There will continue to be an annual canvass each year with the publication of the Register of Electors each December and rolling individual electoral registration.
- 4.8 Once registered, individuals will only need to confirm that their existing details have not changed. This will be done as part of the annual household canvass.
- 4.9 In future electors will be able to apply for registration online at [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) or by contacting the Electoral Registration Office.

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5. Progress since the last meeting of the Sub-committee
  - 5.1 Since the last meeting in November 2013 the last pre-IER household canvass has been completed and the Register of Electors was published on 17 February 2014. Great efforts have been made to ensure that the register is as accurate as possible to assist with the “confirmation” of electors during the live-run.
  - 5.2 The final decision to progress IER against the original timetable was only made by the Minister in December 2013, by which time local authorities were already focussing heavily on implementing the annual canvass and preparing for the European election. Decisions were, and indeed are, still being made by the Cabinet Office which have fundamental impacts on the project. The decision of the Cabinet Office that the format of the new prescribed registration forms should be A3 has required every local authority to invest in new scanners and required additional funding from central government.
  - 5.3 The Cabinet Office has worked closely with the electoral management software suppliers to try and ensure that their systems can meet the new requirements of IER but the suppliers have been under great pressure to deliver. This has meant that there have been frequent upgrades to the Council’s Halarose software throughout the Spring and a number of “connectivity” tests have been carried out, as recently as the end of May.
  - 5.4 It is true to say that we are entering uncharted territory and the success of the transition to IER will depend upon how well the election management software systems are able to meet IER requirements and how well the interface with the IER Digital Service works in practice. Dartford has passed all the recent “connectivity” tests but the reality is that we will not know how well the transition will go until going “live”.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1 The Council has prepared for the transition to IER as well as possible given these uncertainties, the likely under-resourcing by central government, late changes to proposed arrangements by the Cabinet Office and the need to deliver the canvass, by-elections and the European election. It remains to be seen what effect the Electoral Commission publicity campaign in July and August will have but it is anticipated that Electoral Services will see a high level of registration activity across the summer and throughout the transition period and the preparations for the combined elections in May 2015.

7. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

A Council performing strongly.

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8. Financial, legal, staffing and other administrative implications and risk assessments

Financial Implications	There are likely to be significant additional costs involved in implementing IER as it is anticipated that extra staff will be needed during the introductory phase and that stationery and postage budgets will be much higher. Despite the Government's undertaking to fully fund the additional costs over and beyond the costs of normal "business as usual" registration services it is entirely possible that the allocated up-front funding will not cover the full costs of implementation.
Legal Implications	The Council must comply with the requirements of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.
Staffing Implications	Additional staff may be required in 2014 and beyond in the Electoral services Team.
Administrative Implications	There will be a significant increase in the processing of applications for registration and the requirements to pursue non-responders.
Risk Assessment	The introduction of IER is new territory for all Electoral Administrators and is being introduced at a time when there are other significant events taking place in the electoral calendar. However plans and resources are in place and the risk is being managed.

9. Appendices  
None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<u>Documents consulted</u>	<u>Date / File Ref</u>	<u>Report Author</u>	<u>Section and Directorate</u>	<u>Exempt Information Category</u>
IER Report to the Sub-committee – 20 November 2013		A Twyman (01322) 343430	Member Services	N/A