

**ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Deputy Leader</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>13 January 2015</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Individual Electoral Registration</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Resources</b>

**5. Summary**

This report provides an update on progress in the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration

**6. Recommendations**

That the Deputy Leader notes the contents of the report and supports the proposals outlined.

## **7. Proposals and Details**

### **7.1 IER “Go Live” 10 Jun 2014.**

The new system of registration became effective for all new applications on 10 June 2014. Under IER, each person wishing to be entered on the Electoral Register is required to register individually, rather than by household. Applicants are asked to provide identifying information (date of birth and national insurance number) which enables their identity to be verified with records held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) before they are added to the register. People who cannot provide this information may prove their identity using an alternative form of evidence.

The new system allows for telephone and online applications. The council’s website has a link to the online registration service and funding from the Cabinet Office was used to purchase software to allow the council’s contact centre to take applications by telephone on a “golden” number. The telephone registration service went live on 1 July and contact centre staff now proactively offer the service to callers contacting the council about a change of address

### **7.2 IER - Confirmation Live Run and Transitional Canvass Jul – Dec 2014**

Following the “Go-live” of IER in July 2014 all electoral registers were matched against DWP records to establish which electors could be “confirmed” and automatically registered under the new system. The highest match rate achieved nationally was 86.40% and Rotherham was within 1% of this with 86.37% which was then increased to 93.15% by use of trusted local records.

Appendix 1 is a detailed breakdown of the confirmation live-run result and includes the following key points:

- 184,460 of a total 198,020 registered electors successfully transferred to the new system and received confirmation letters.
- 48,538 of a total 50,324 postal voters successfully transferred and retained their postal vote without having to do anything else.
- Household Enquiry Forms (HEF) were sent to 11,014 properties where no-one was registered or where the occupants had not responded to the 2013 canvass.
- 13,560 Invitation to Register forms (ITR) were sent to electors whose identity could not be confirmed automatically and who needed to take further action to remain registered under the new system.

The transitional canvass to obtain responses to the HEFs & ITRs was conducted during August – November 2014 and although this was interrupted by the PCC by-election which was called at short notice and affected the whole area, a revised register of electors was published on 15 December 2014.

The electorate figure at the commencement of IER was 198,020 and on publication of the revised register on 15 December 2014 the electorate figure was 197,925. The total number of postal voters at 15 December 2014 was 49,374.

At publication date there were still 7,681 electors who did not transfer automatically and had not responded to the ITR. These were carried forward into the December 2014 register under the transitional provisions and will not be removed from the register until December 2015. However, 467 of these electors were postal voters and have had their absent vote removed. They will receive a postal vote cancellation notice along with another ITR and a new postal vote application form before the end of January to allow them another opportunity to respond and return to voting by post.

It is likely that many of these “carry forward” electors have moved and this is why they haven’t responded. The full household canvass to be conducted from July 2015 will help determine where this is the case before the publication of the December 2015 register.

There is much work still to be done to ensure an accurate and up to date register going into the May 2015 elections.

### **7.3 The Future: Jan to May 2015**

The effect of the PCC by-election and the already heavy workload associated with the combined Parliamentary, Borough and Parish elections in May this year present challenges in keeping up Rotherham’s pro-active approach to registration. Yet it is clearly essential for successful delivery of these important elections that accurate and up to date registers are maintained.

Proposals for January to March include the following:

- Use of LEA records to identify any attainers who haven’t registered and send letters with invitations to register
- Weekly mailing with household enquiry form to home-movers identified from C Tax records to encourage them to re-register at the new address
- Personal canvass visits to all properties which appear from Council Tax records to be occupied but where no-one is currently registered
- Personal canvass visits to Nursing/Residential homes to advise and assist with registration for those able to register and to vote.
- Household Notification letter – to every household to coincide with National Registration Day on 5 February confirming who is registered to vote at the address and explaining what to do to get registered in time for the May elections.
- Working with the council’s Youth Service and Community Engagement teams to engage target groups. The documents at appendices 2 and 3 give more detail on these activities and plans.

All of these efforts will be taking place whilst the Electoral Services team is also facing the demands of preparing for the biggest and most complex combined elections ever undertaken in Rotherham. The team is small and its workload has already increased significantly under IER and it now faces a sustained period of immense pressure. Full support from elected members, managers and colleagues across the council will be essential for success in delivery of the elections in May 2015 and successful implementation of IER.

#### **7.4 The Future: Jul – Dec 2015 onwards - Annual Canvass**

From July 2015 and each year thereafter, the Electoral Registration Officer will still be required to undertake an annual canvass of households by sending out Household Enquiry Forms to all residential properties asking for details of who is resident. The information provided on the returned Household Enquiry Forms can no longer be actioned at this stage but will be used to initiate steps for the removal of electors who are no longer resident or to issue individual invitations to register to any new electors at the address.

The work involved to conduct the annual canvass and publish a revised register is more complex and takes longer than under the old household canvass when the information provided on a canvass form was used to add, amend or remove several individuals in one simple step. Under the new regime, the HEF simply provides the information to initiate further enquiries or actions and each piece of information must be treated as follows:

**Additions:** any new electors added to a HEF must be issued with individual invitations to register and followed up with two reminders and personal canvass visits if they do not respond and register individually.

**Amendments:** a change of name (eg by marriage) indicated on a HEF must be followed up by requesting documentary evidence or issuing an ITR for the person to reapply to register.

**Removals:** a person whose name is crossed off a HEF cannot be removed from the register without a review of electoral registration unless the facts can be confirmed by a second piece of evidence such as some “return to sender” correspondence or confirmation from other local records such as C Tax.

Although the annual canvass will take longer and require more processing work, the statutory publication date for the revised register will remain the same (by the 1 December each year).

#### **7.5 The Future: January to July 2016 onwards– Continuous Registration**

Following publication of the revised register, there is a continuing statutory obligation for Electoral Registration Officers to identify people who are not registered (eg home-movers) and to issue invitations to register within 28 days of becoming aware of their presence at an address. These must be followed up with reminders and personal canvass visits as necessary to achieve response. It has not yet been possible to determine how the new requirement for continuous personal canvassing can be met. Monthly Notices of Alteration with details of associated changes to electoral registers will be published by the first working day of each month.

### **8. Finance**

There are financial implications but government has given assurances that all “additional burdens” associated with IER will be fully funded. The amount of IER funding for 2015-16 is expected to be announced shortly but it must be noted that

the council already has a statutory duty to fund electoral registration and the additional funding cannot be used to make up shortfalls in electoral registration budgets. Cabinet Office is currently considering our request for some additional funding to cover the cost of the proposed Household Notification Letter at 7.3 above.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

If IER is not properly implemented and the transition is not successful, the electoral register may be incomplete and inaccurate. Electoral registers underpin democracy in determining LA and Parliamentary electoral boundaries and inaccurate registers may affect the outcome of elections, increasing the risk of electoral fraud and potential for challenges to election results.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

In addition to fulfilling the statutory obligations, ensuring a successful transition to IER will support the Council's Community Strategy and Corporate Plan by providing the appropriate mechanisms for community engagement in the Democratic process.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2013

Representation of the People (England & Wales) (Description of Electoral Registers and Amendment) Regulations 2013

Representation of the People (England & Wales) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2014

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