

**Report of The Chief Executive**

**INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

**1 Purpose of report**

This report will provide members with an update on the changes due to be made in respect of electoral registration, identifying implications for such changes so far as is possible.

**2 Executive summary**

Under the current system of electoral registration an annual household canvass form is sent to each address, which is completed by one individual on behalf of everyone living at the property. From 2014 this system of registration will be replaced by one of Individual Electoral Registration (IER): citizens will need to make individual applications to register, providing personal identifiers (such as date of birth and National Insurance number) which can be checked.

This report sets out the actions required by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and the implications of IER for the council's resources, so far as they are known at this time.

**3 Appendices**

Expected electoral timetable for 2013-15.

**4 Proposed action:**

**The committee is invited to RESOLVE that:**

- 4.1 monies allocated to the council for Individual Electoral Registration under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 be directed to the council's electoral registration budgets;**
- 4.2 sufficient resource be allocated, within budget, to the introduction of IER;**
- 4.3 further reports on the progress of the project and any exceptional resource requirements be made to a future meeting.**

**5 Background**

- 5.1 The government aims to improve the quality and accuracy of electoral registration within the UK, focusing in particular on individuals who may not be registered to vote. Individual Electoral Registration (IER) is the means by which**

- the government hopes to achieve this. It will put the onus on the individual to make sure they are registered, providing evidence of identity where necessary.
- 5.2 Other stated aims see IER as a means of tackling electoral fraud and preparing for online registration.
  - 5.3 The IER programme spans three years, from 2013-2015, and is being closely managed by the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission. The ERO's activities and progress are being monitored on a monthly basis.
  - 5.4 The ERO has already matched the property database within the register of electors with the council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer. All residential property in the borough is listed on the register of electors and is updated regularly to reflect any changes to the Gazetteer.
  - 5.5 Unlike most authorities, the ERO at Wellingborough retains a part-time Visiting Officer who spends the majority of the year (except when the canvass is under way) door-knocking to improve the accuracy of the register. In the main he concentrates on properties from which no household registration form has been received. This is in place of casual canvassers and appears to have improved the accuracy of the register at no additional cost. The Electoral Commission has approved this approach; in fact it has been classified as "above" the required performance standard.
  - 5.6 Cabinet Office research has identified the potential of matching the names of individuals on the electoral register with data held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This would provide an independent means of highlighting any potential inaccuracies in the register.
  - 5.7 In the summer of 2013 each local authority will be required to participate in a Confirmation Dry Run: an electronic comparison of the register of electors and DWP data, which will give the ERO the level of match. This is intended to help the ERO plan for the transition to IER in 2014. Pilots have already been undertaken in 14 areas to assess the feasibility of the process, and there was an overall match of over 70% of electors.
  - 5.8 The borough currently has 33,683 residential properties, so the likelihood is that more than 10,000 properties will have to be investigated as we approach IER. This will take the form of invitations to register, reminders, and/or personal visits to check who is resident.
  - 5.9 Lower match rates were found in areas where there was a higher than average concentration of students, people living in private rented accommodation, and communal establishments. It is inevitable therefore that certain parts of the borough will require additional resources.
  - 5.10 Cabinet Office has committed to funding the transition to IER, and it is expected that the level of grant available to local authorities will be directly related to the percentage of records matched with DWP data in 2013.

## **6 Discussion**

- 6.1 The transition to IER is being carefully prescribed, monitored and managed by the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission. Detailed actions and timetables have been provided; whilst enabling legislation is already in place.

- 6.2 This does not mean that other electoral activities have ceased: in the midst of the process the electoral services team are due to/have undertaken the following:
- (a) County council elections on 2 May 2013;
  - (b) European Parliamentary elections on 22 May 2014
  - (c) the Local Government Boundary Commission for England electoral review of the borough, due to end in mid-2014
  - (d) referenda for neighbourhood planning (dates not yet known)
  - (e) Parliamentary and borough/parish council elections on 7 May 2015.
- 6.3 Key dates for all known electoral events are set out in the appendix.
- 6.4 Until further detail is published in respect of IER processes it is difficult to assess the level of resources required. An early assessment is set out below:
- (a) 2013: additional ICT support to prepare hardware and software for the dry run matching process;
  - (b) 2013: identification of project management resource, which will be required throughout the project;
  - (c) 2013 and onwards: potential requirement for additional administrative resources and additional canvassers; this is difficult to estimate until further details of processes are available;
  - (d) 2014: additional funding for printing and postage (cannot be costed as registration processes are not yet finalised);
  - (e) 2015 and onwards: permanent adjustments to printing and postage budgets, but at a lower level than 2014. Again this depends on processes to be followed, but ultimately budgets may be reduced if online registration becomes popular.
- 6.5 When the transition period has ended (after the elections in May 2015) anyone who has not been confirmed via the matching process, nor provided their personal identifiers, will be removed from the register of electors. They will need to make a new application to register, providing their personal identifiers for verification against DWP records.
- 6.6 Much national publicity is planned for the whole of the transition period, and local authorities are expected to support and enhance this approach so that electors know how to make sure they are registered to vote. The Cabinet Office has stated that “the majority of engagement with residents...will be delivered locally by you.”
- 6.7 Funding and budgets:
- (a) The Government has stated that it “remains committed to funding all the additional costs arising from IER, over and above the current cost of electoral registration which will be met from local authority budgets in the usual way”.
  - (b) It is difficult to plan ahead; to date the council has only been notified of the non-ringfenced grant for 2013/14, made under S31 of the Local Government Act 2003. The total amount allocated is £5838.71 and is intended to cover change management and the confirmation dry run. Changes to our electoral management computer systems will be paid for separately by the Cabinet Office.
- 6.8 The challenges for 2013/14 are twofold:

- (a) to ensure that our IT is equipped to carry out the confirmation dry run on 30 July;
- (b) to ensure that a senior officer understands the requirements of IER and is planning ahead to comply with all the requirements of legislation, the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission.

6.9 Additional challenges for 2014 and onwards present themselves:

- (a) contact, follow-ups and reminders to individuals in a household; previously it was only one contact for a household. This will result in an increase in the demand on both employee resources, stationery and postage;
- (b) confirmation of personal identifiers with DWP: this has the potential to delay the ability to register just before an election (11 working days before), but is entirely dependent on the effectiveness of IT links which have, so far, only been tested on pilots.

## 7 Legal powers

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

## 8 Financial and value for money implications

As stated above, the government has committed to funding IER. The sum available for 2013/14 is extremely low and is not expected to cover all costs, particularly in respect of IT preparation and project management. Records of costs are being kept and an additional application for grant will be made, if required.

Future funding cannot be anticipated because there will be no indication of levels of financial support for some time.

## 9 Risk analysis

<b>Nature of risk</b>	<b>Consequences if realised</b>	<b>Likelihood of occurrence</b>	<b>Control measures</b>
Confirmation dry run not completed on the due date	Council will not comply with government requirements	Unlikely	ICT project manager identified and Head of Service responsible  ICT improvements and testing in place
Insufficient funding for the project	Additional drain on council resources	Possible	Monitoring of costs in place, but some internal time commitment expected

## **10 Implications for resources**

The main resource identified at this stage will be for management of the project which will span two to three years. This will be carried out by one or two senior officers in the Resources Directorate and an ICT project manager.

In the longer term it is likely that there will be an increase in administration related to electoral registration and the transition to IER, although this will probably reduce again if online registration is introduced.

Additional administrative support will be required, but cannot be quantified until the processes for 2014/15 are known. The guidance from the Electoral Commission is not likely to be published until later this year, or early next year.

## **11 Implications for stronger and safer communities**

One of the aims of IER is to improve the opportunity for citizens to vote at elections and ensure that those who may have been missed from the register of electors in the past are given the opportunity to be included. Increased registration will improve the democratic process by increasing the potential of local involvement.

## **12 Implications for equalities**

IER will provide increased opportunities for registration. At present there is the possibility that individuals living in shared households may not be aware that they can register. The publicity surrounding IER and the increased efforts to contact all sectors of society should improve the accessibility of the democratic process to harder to reach groups.

## **13 Author and contact officer**

Bridget Lawrence, Head of Resources

## **14 Consultees**

Directors and Heads of Service

## **15 Background papers**

All documentation relating to IER is in the public domain, via the Cabinet Office or Electoral Commission.

## Appendix

### Expected Electoral Timetable 2013 to 2015

1 February 2013	Revised register published with new county council boundaries
26 March 2013	Election timetable for 2 May begins
2 May 2013	County council elections
4 June 2013	Electoral review: closing date for warding pattern submissions
30 July 2013	Dry run of data-matching of register against DWP databases
August 2013	Electoral review: draft recommendations published, for consultation (12 weeks)
1 October 2013	Start of canvass
November 2013	Earls Barton neighbourhood plan: referendum
8 November 2013	Assessment of each authority's readiness for IER by Cabinet Office
Jan/Feb 2014	Electoral review: final recommendations published
17 February 2014	Publication of new register
Late April 2014	Election timetable for 22 May begins
May 2014	Wollaston neighbourhood plan: referendum
22 May 2014	European Parliamentary election (counting on the following Sunday)
June/July 2014	Irchester neighbourhood plan: referendum
July 2014	Data-matching of register against DWP databases
July/Aug 2014	IER goes live
July/Aug 2014	Electoral review: Order made
1 December 2014	Publication of revised register
April 2015	Election timetable for 7 May begins, including deadline for registering to vote at May elections
7 May 2015	Parliamentary, Borough and Parish council elections
July 2015	Start household canvass
1 December 2015	IER register published