

Individual Electoral Registration

Portfolio	Corporate
Ward(s) Affected:	n/a

Purpose
To brief Members in relation to changes in the way electors are registered to vote in the future.

Background

1. The Cabinet Office is implementing a commitment in the Coalition Programme for Government to change from the current system of household electoral registration to Individual Electoral Registration (IER), where every application to register is made individually and verified to reduce electoral fraud and the perception of fraud.
2. The introduction of a modernised electoral registration system will be the biggest change in the way electors are registered to vote for 100 years. It aims to make it easier for people to register to vote, and will open up the way for on-line registration (through the government digital service portal) and Electoral Registration Officers will have discretion to allow applications by telephone and in person.
3. From June 2014 the transition to IER will commence and finish in December 2015 when all electors on the register will be registered under IER.

Transition to IER

4. During the transition phase, data sets will be used to confirm existing entries in the Electoral Register. The primary data base will be that of the Department of Work and Pensions but local databases may be used too.
5. The Council's dry run of the data matching process, in June 2013, resulted in 81% of those on the register being successfully confirmed. Local data matching is expected to result in a further 5% to 10% of electors being matched.
6. In accordance with the Regulations, following the live run data matching exercise in July 2014, all electors will receive an individually addressed communication, by post, from the Electoral Registration Officer. This will be either to
 - a. confirm that they are registered under IER, where their details have matched with data sets; or
 - b. ask them to complete an Invitation to Register where data matching has not confirmed identity. An individual must provide personal information including name, address, date of birth and National Insurance Number. Details received from Invitations to Register then have to be verified against DWP records before an elector can be confirmed under IER.

7. Properties where no electors are registered will be sent Household Enquiry Forms (HEF) to discover potential unregistered electors.
8. In December 2014 anyone on the electoral register whose registration is unconfirmed under IER will remain on it for the elections in May 2015. However unconfirmed electors will have their postal or proxy vote cancelled and they will not be able to reapply unless their registration is confirmed under IER.
9. Once registered under IER, individuals will need only to confirm that their details have not changed by completing, annually, a Household Enquiry Form.

Failure to Respond

10. Failure to response to a Household Enquiry Form or an Invitation to Register will require first and second reminders to be sent and a personal visit to be made.
11. There is a civil penalty for a failure to register. The fine will be waived by registration. The criminal penalty for failing to return the household canvass form remains.

Maximising Registration

12. The Cabinet Office is concerned that nationally IER will result in a fall in registration. The limits of data-matching may leave a significant minority of those currently registered to vote unconfirmed. People who have moved, changed their name through marriage, or any other personal change, may be lost to the system during the transition.
13. As a result a national publicity campaign, led by the Electoral Commission, will be carried out in July 2014. In addition, the Electoral Registration Officer will conduct a local campaign at a similar time to inform electors of the changes.
14. There will be a need to carry out targeted activities to reach those who are least likely to be registered or to respond to the change, including certain minority ethnic groups. Premises such as Care Homes and Houses in Multiple Occupation will also require a targeted approach.

2015 Onwards

15. From 2015 onwards there will continue to be an annual household canvass to keep the register up to date. Any potential new electors disclosed as a result of the canvass will be required to complete an Invitation to Register and their details will have to be verified against DWP records before they can be included in the Register.

Resource Implications

16. The Cabinet Office has committed to fully funding the additional costs relating to the change to IER. A grant of £6,121 was received in 2013/14 and £31,819 has been allocated for 2014/15. There will also be an additional

grant to cover the costs of purchasing an A3 scanner. However there are concerns that the Cabinet Office grant funding may be insufficient to meet the costs resulting from the transition phase particularly in relation to staffing resources and increased postage and printing requirements.

17. No funding has been guaranteed for 2015/16 onwards. IER requires more postal communication than the previous scheme. There will continue to be an annual canvass with each residential property being sent a Household Enquiry Form. However any changes discovered as a result of the Household Enquiry Form will require further communication with the elector.
18. Under IER there is an extended process in order for an individual to be registered and it is estimated that in some cases this could involve multiple contacts with the elector.
19. It is difficult to estimate the effect of on-line registration in relation to a reduction in costs. In any event successful on-line registration will still require the Electoral Registration Officer to send confirmation of registration in writing by post to the address of the elector.

Recommendation

20. The Council is asked to note the change to Individual Electoral Registration.

Annexes: None

Background Papers: None

Report Author Jane Sherman 01276 707336
e-mail: jane.sherman@surreyheath.gov.uk

Executive Service Head: Richard Payne 01276 707150
e-mail: richard.payne@surreyheath.gov.uk